

Western Pacific Operations

HISTORY OF U. S. MARINE CORPS
OPERATIONS IN WORLD WAR II

VOLUME IV

By

GEORGE W. GARAND

TRUMAN R. STROBRIDGE

Historical Division, Headquarters, U. S. Marine Corps

1971

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Foreword

This book is the fourth in the five-volume history of Marine Corps operations in World War II. The story of Peleliu, Iwo Jima, and Marine artillery and aviation in the Philippines, as previously narrated in separate detail in preliminary monographs, has been reevaluated and rewritten to depict events in proper proportion to each other and in correct perspective to the war as a whole. New material, particularly from Japanese and other sources that has become available since the earlier monograph series was published, has been included to provide fresh insight into the Marine Corps' contribution to the final victory in the Pacific.

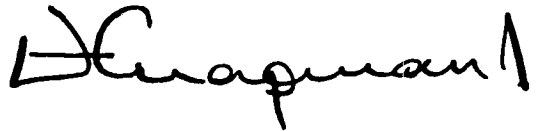
The period covered by this history, essentially from mid-September 1944 to late March 1945, covers the continuation of the United States drive from the Central Pacific to the Western Carolines and the Volcano-Bonin Islands at the very doorstep of Japan. Once again it became the task of the Marine Corps to put into practice the amphibious doctrine that had been developed during the prewar years, modified and perfected during earlier operations in the Solomons, Gilberts, Marshalls, and Marianas. The course of events on Peleliu and Iwo Jima demonstrated the basic soundness of Marine Corps tactics and techniques in the face of skillful and tenacious resistance offered by a highly motivated and well trained foe who was determined to defend his possessions to the last.

While the American amphibious assault team fought its way through the Japanese defenses towards the Home Islands, Marine aviation wrote a glorious chapter of its own. Frequently denied the opportunity of flying direct support in amphibious operations, Marine aviators developed and put into practice a doctrine of close air support that more than proved its worth during the recapture of the Philippines. The continuous neutralization of bypassed enemy-held islands in the Central Pacific by Marine air isolated sizable Japanese garrisons from their bases of supply and rendered them powerless to support the enemy war effort until their surrender at the end of the war.

The numbers of men and quantities of materiel employed during the operations narrated in this volume defy the imagination. In this connection it is worth recalling that the successful execution of these operations depended on joint Army-Navy-Marine cooperation, which became ever more pronounced as the war approached its final phase. Combined with improved tactics and weapons on the field of battle was the highly flexible

and efficient Marine command organization designed to meet the requirements of modern warfare.

As on other battlefields before World War II and since, the Marines who fought and died in the Philippines, on Peleliu, and on Iwo Jima wrote with their blood an indelible account of courage and sacrifice that will live on in their country's history, to serve as a guide and inspiration to future generations.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "L. F. Chapman, Jr.", with a stylized, cursive script.

L. F. CHAPMAN, JR
GENERAL, U.S. MARINE CORPS
COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS

Reviewed and approved
26 May 1970

Preface

In a series of boldly conceived and executed operations, American forces in the Pacific Theater captured and developed a number of strategically placed islands that were to serve as springboards for the inexorable advance towards the Japanese home islands. The Guadalcanal campaign, first offensive step after a year of reverses in this theater, marked the beginning of the American counteroffensive that gathered momentum until a steamroller of unprecedented force smashed its way across the vast expanses of the Central and Western Pacific.

Hand in hand with the accelerating tempo of operations went improvements in the techniques employed in the amphibious assault and the sometimes protracted operations inland. By the time the Peleliu operation was launched in mid-September 1944, the Japanese had changed their tactics of defending the beaches and launching a final *banzai* once the inevitable end was in sight to a far more sophisticated defense that amounted to an extended delaying action conducted from well dug tunnels and cave positions which had to be taken at great cost to the attacking force. The battle for Iwo Jima, which got under way on 19 February 1945, represented a battle of attrition in the truest sense, with losses in men and materiel far out of proportion to the size of the objective. Aside from its tactical value, Iwo Jima assumed strategic importance in signalling the Japanese government and people that the United States was determined to bring the war in the Pacific to a victorious conclusion and that even the heaviest losses would not deter Americans from this purpose.

New tactics employed by the Marine Corps in the course of the war were not limited to fighting on the ground. The speedy expansion of Marine strength following the Pearl Harbor debacle was accompanied by a proportionate growth of the air arm that had existed in miniature size up to that time. Denied the use of carriers during the early years of the war, Marine aviators discovered through trial and error that they could make an important contribution to the ground troops in furnishing a type of close air support that could be rendered quickly and with devastating results to the enemy. Together with this support came the creation and perfection of the air liaison team which provided a direct and vital link between troops on the ground, whether Marine or Army, and the supporting aircraft. The bombing of bypassed islands in the Central Pacific, as carried out by Marine aviation over a prolonged period of time, under-

scored the fact that enemy bastions of considerable strength could be effectively neutralized from the air without having to be subjected to costly ground assault.

A section of this volume has been devoted to the evolution of the organization that had to be created to coordinate the training, flow of replacements and supplies, and overall employment of Marine field components. This was the Fleet Marine Force, which was conceived long before World War II. Its growth and development clearly mirror the organizational demands made on the Corps during the war years. The chapters provide the reader with a better understanding of the command organization that made possible many of the famous amphibious assaults of World War II.

Our purpose in publishing this operational history in durable form is to make the Marine Corps record permanently available for study by military personnel and the general public as well as by serious students of military history. We have made a conscientious effort to be objective in our treatment of the actions of Marines and of the men of other services who fought at their side. We have tried to write with understanding about our former enemies and in this effort have received invaluable help from the Japanese themselves. Few people so militant and unyielding in war have been as dispassionate and analytical about their actions in peace. We owe a special debt of gratitude to Mr. Susumu Nishiura, Chief of the War History Office, Defense Agency of Japan and to the many researchers and historians of his office that reviewed our draft manuscripts.

This five-volume series was planned and outlined by Mr. Henry I. Shaw, Jr., Chief Historian, while Mr. George W. Garand was responsible for Volume IV itself. Mr. Truman R. Strobridge, originally assigned as the author of this volume, wrote the first four chapters of the Peleliu campaign before he left the Marine Corps to become a historian with the Department of the Army. Mr. Garand wrote the rest of this book, revising and editing it for publication. In his research on the Peleliu operation, Mr. Garand frequently consulted the material assembled for the monograph *The Assault on Peleliu* by Major Frank O. Hough; material dealing with the Philippines was obtained from the monograph *Marine Aviation in the Philippines* by Major Charles W. Boggs, Jr. In preparing the narrative for Iwo Jima, the monograph *Iwo Jima: Amphibious Epic*, prepared by Lieutenant Colonel Whitman S. Bartley, served as a valuable guide. Mr. Garand also prepared all the appendices. The Director of Marine Corps History made the final critical review of portions of the manuscript.

A number of leading participants in the actions described have commented on the preliminary drafts of pertinent portions of the book. Their valuable assistance is gratefully acknowledged. Several senior officers, in particular General Oliver P. Smith, Admiral George H. Fort, Admiral

Jesse B. Oldendorf, Lieutenant General Julian C. Smith, Lieutenant General Merwin H. Silverthorn, Lieutenant General Thomas A. Wornham, Lieutenant General Louis E. Woods, Major General Ford O. Rogers, Major General Dudley S. Brown, and Brigadier General John S. Letcher made valuable contributions through their written comments, as did Lieutenant General Lewis B. Puller and Brigadier General John R. Lanigan during personal interviews.

Special thanks are due to the historical agencies of the other services for their critical readings of draft chapters of this book. Outstanding among the many official historians who measurably assisted the authors were: Dr. Stetson Conn, Chief Historian and Mr. Robert R. Smith, Head, General History Branch, Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army; Dr. Dean C. Allard, Head, Operational Archives Branch, Naval History Division, Department of the Navy; and Dr. Robert F. Futrell, Historian, Historical Research Division, Air University, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama.

Captain Charles B. Collins and his predecessors as Historical Division/Branch Administrative Officers, Chief Warrant Officer Jo E. Kennedy, Second Lieutenant Gerald S. Duncan, and First Lieutenants John J. Hainsworth and D'Arcy E. Grisier ably handled the many exacting duties involved in processing the volume from first drafts through final printed form. The bulk of the early preliminary typescripts was prepared by Miss Kay P. Sue, who, with the assistance of Sergeant Michael L. Gardner, also expertly handled the painstaking task of typing the final manuscript for the printer. Miss Sue, assisted by Miss Charlotte L. Webb, also performed the meticulous work demanded in preparing the index.

The maps were drafted by Sergeant Earl L. Wilson and his successor, Sergeant Kenneth W. White.

A large, elegant handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "F. C. Caldwell". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "F" and a long, sweeping underline.

F. C. CALDWELL
COLONEL, U.S. MARINE CORPS (RETIRED)
DIRECTOR OF MARINE CORPS HISTORY

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PART I

Background

Introduction

The military operations narrated in this volume cover neither the beginning of the greatest global conflict in history nor its end. They do, however, describe in detail two of the major amphibious campaigns in the Western Pacific, Pel-eliu and Iwo Jima, and the prolonged fighting that followed until all enemy resistance was quelled. In addition, the little-known exploits of Marine artillery and air in the Philippines and the accomplishments of Marine flying squadrons in the reduction of enemy positions in the Central and Western Pacific are covered.

In themselves, the day-by-day accounts of terrain seized, sorties flown, rounds fired, numbers of enemy killed, and casualties sustained tend to have a numbing effect. The mere recitation of the thousands of tons of artillery ammunition expended in the preliminary bombardment and small arms ammunition fired in weeks of close combat tend to overwhelm the imagination. Nor does the spectacle of 90,000 men battling for weeks at close quarters appear realistic unless it is remembered that such combat actually took place on Iwo Jima. Even though this volume tells of the exploits of Marines, both ground and air, in the Western Pacific, it should be recalled that their heroism was but a small part in the mosaic of global war, and that their sacrifice was directly linked with that of the remaining mili-

tary services of the United States and its Allies.

World War II had its roots in the political, economic, and social conditions that arose or prevailed in the years following the end of the greatest conflagration the world had experienced up to that time. In a carefully prepared address to the Senate on 22 January 1917, President Woodrow Wilson had voiced the view that any lasting peace had to be a peace without victory, since "victory would mean peace forced upon a loser, a victor's peace imposed upon the vanquished. Only a peace between equals can last."¹

Almost prophetically, the President continued that "peace must be followed by some concert of powers which will make it virtually impossible that any such catastrophe should ever overwhelm us again."²

As part of the peace settlement following the end of World War I, the German island possessions in the Central Pacific, notably the Marianas, Carolines, and Marshalls, were mandated to the Japanese, who also gained control of former German concessions in China.

¹ President Woodrow Wilson's address to the U.S. Senate, 22 Jan 17, as cited in Oscar Theodore Barck, Jr., and Nelson Manfred Blake, *Since 1900—A History of the United States* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1965), pp. 210-211.

² *Ibid.*

While Germany was being stripped of her outlying possessions and the groundwork for future trouble was being laid in Central Europe, where strips of territory inhabited by ethnic Germans were being incorporated into adjacent countries, Japan emerged as the strongest power in the western Pacific. While the Japanese, under the terms of the mandate given to them by the League of Nations, were permitted to govern and develop the islands placed under their charge, they were forbidden to construct fortifications on them, a point further underscored by the Washington Naval Treaty of 1922.

Quite possibly, given a few decades of global peace, the major nations of the world might well have succeeded in restoring their shattered economies, rebuilding their political structures, and learning to live with their neighbors across the multitude of newly created borders. Unfortunately, this was not to be the case. The severe bloodletting that the big powers had undergone in World War I bred distrust, dissatisfaction, and an increasing trend towards national and international violence among the victors and vanquished alike.

Even before the end of World War I, two major upheavals occurred in Russia, with inherent loss of life and destruction of property unheard of since the Mongol invasion. While the Red and White factions were locked in a struggle to the death, the peasants, workers, and remnants of the erstwhile aristocracy suffered drastic privations. In the end little changed, and one oppressive regime was succeeded by another. Lack of faith in their respective leaders and/or national destinies

was to cause overwhelming changes in Italy and Germany where fascist dictatorships were established without recourse to civil war, once the people had lost faith in the parliamentary forms of government they had enjoyed since the end of the war.

In the United States, following the conclusion of the armistice, there was a considerable amount of confusion as to the shape in which the postwar world was to be rebuilt. President Wilson was an ardent advocate of a League of Nations in which every member, regardless of size, would have one vote. The five big powers, Great Britain, France, Italy, Japan, and the United States, were to sit on an executive council permanently, while non-permanent seats were to be allotted to four of the smaller nations. A permanent Court of International Justice was to arbitrate disputes between the member nations. Among the foremost functions of the League of Nations was the preservation of peace, as expressed in Article 10, which President Wilson regarded as the heart of its constitution. This article provided that:

The Members of the League undertake to respect and preserve as against external aggression the territorial integrity and existing political independence of all members of the League. In case of any threat of danger of such aggression the Council shall advise upon the means by which this obligation shall be fulfilled.³

Enforcement of a global peace was predicated on the assumption that no aggressor could withstand the combined strength of outraged humanity, and that all member nations would take con-

³ Article 10 of the Constitution, League of Nations, as cited in *ibid.*, p. 251.

certed action without delay against any form of aggression. The United States had joined the Allies "in order to make the world safe for democracy," and President Wilson clearly perceived that the future of world peace could be safeguarded only if all the major powers combined their strength, manpower, and resources in stabilizing a shaky world. Many influential Americans felt now that the war had been won, in no small measure by virtue of their efforts, that the time had come to withdraw from the arena of international politics. In this they were guided by the parting words of the first President of the United States who had clearly stated:

The great rule of conduct for us in regard to foreign nations is, in extending our commercial relations to have with them as little political connections as possible . . . It is our true policy to steer clear of permanent alliances . . . Taking care always to keep ourselves by suitable establishments on a respectable defensive posture, we may safely trust to temporary alliances for extraordinary emergencies.⁴

Continued upheavals in Europe, economic considerations, and disillusionment with prolonged bickering at the conference table soon led the United States to revert to its hallowed tradition of isolationism, thus deserting Wilson's leadership that, had it been carried out to its fullest extent, might have assured the world a period of peace and stability. Instead, the American nation rejected not only Wilson's vision of a just peace, but along with it his political party and the League of Nations. On

the positive side, the Republican administration of President Warren G. Harding convened a disarmament conference in July 1921, initially limited to Great Britain, France, Italy, and Japan. The number of participants was subsequently expanded to include several of the smaller countries. Soviet Russia, socially still unacceptable and far removed from obtaining official United States recognition, was excluded.

On 12 November 1921, three years after the World War I armistice, the conference was held in Washington. Considering the differences that existed between the attending powers, substantial agreement was quickly reached by the three major nations, the United States, Great Britain, and Japan, as well as by France and Italy, with reference to the ratio to be employed as to the ships to be retained by each country's navy and the number to be scrapped. At the same time, the participants agreed to halt the construction of warships, but not aircraft carriers, in excess of 10,000 tons or equipped with guns larger than 8 inches in caliber for a period of 10 years. The participants agreed to the terms of the agreement largely because it resulted in a sizable cut in military spending at a time when the various treasuries were badly depleted by the drain of World War I. Japan received an additional incentive as her reward for agreeing to the ratio, which was to become a major factor in shaping the policies that the major powers were to adopt in dealing with various areas of the Pacific.

By way of a compromise, the United States agreed that she would not fortify any of the islands under her control in

⁴ Victor Plattsits, ed., *Washington's Farewell Address* (New York: New York Public Library, 1935), pp. 155-56.

the Pacific, except for Hawaii. The United States specifically agreed not to fortify the Philippines, Guam, Wake, or the Aleutian Islands; Great Britain likewise agreed not to fortify Hong Kong, Borneo, the Solomons, and the Gilberts. In turn, the Japanese agreed not to fortify Formosa or any of the former German possessions in the Pacific north of the equator, including specifically the Marianas less Guam, which was under American control, and the Carolines.

A Four-Power Pact, to which England, France, Japan, and the United States were signatories called for a mutual recognition of insular rights in the Pacific. This pact, which was to be in force for a 10-year period, called for the adjustment of any difficulties that might arise by way of the conference table. In order to eliminate a further source of irritation in the Far East, a Nine-Power Treaty, subscribed to by the United States, Great Britain, Japan, Portugal, Belgium, Italy, The Netherlands, France, and China attempted to regulate the often precarious and complicated relations of China with various outside powers. At least on the surface, the Washington Conference seemed to assure a period of international cooperation that, coupled with a reduction in armaments, could lead to a lengthy span of global peace.

Under the terms of the Naval Treaty of 1922, the United States destroyed 19 capital ships of pre-World War I vintage and 13 that were still under construction. Expressed in tonnage, the United States destroyed 842,380 tons; Great Britain 447,750 tons; and Japan 354,709 tons. On the part of American

naval experts the scrapping of major ships as well as the agreement to leave the western Pacific area unfortified evoked sharp criticism, since "the strict observance of these treaties left the United States crippled."⁵ It was to become apparent soon enough that the Washington Conference had left a major loophole in that the quota system did not apply to submarines, cruisers, and destroyers. As a result, it was not long before those nations interested in evading the provisions of the disarmament treaty concentrated their efforts on the construction of these "permitted" vessels.

By 1927, the euphoria that had followed in the wake of the Washington Conference had largely given way to a spirit of sober contemplation. In an attempt to revive the hopeful spirit of 1922, and in order to put an end to the smaller vessel naval armaments race that had been developing, President Calvin Coolidge deemed it advisable to hold a second disarmament conference, which convened in late June 1927 at Geneva. Even though once again the United States offered her good offices in reviving the feeling of trust and conviviality that had marked the Washington Conference, the climate abroad had undergone a distinct change in the five years that had passed since the earlier conference. Both Italy and France refused to participate at all; the United States, Japan, and Great Britain failed

⁵ Maj C. Joseph Bernardo and Dr. Eugene H. Bacon, *American Military Policy—Its Development Since 1775* (Harrisburg: The Military Service Publishing Company, 1957), p. 391.

to reach any substantial agreement in limiting the construction of the smaller naval vessels and, in consequence, the Geneva Conference ended in failure.

Nearly three more years were to pass before the London Naval Treaty of April 1930 once more brought some semblance of order into the international naval armament situation, though once again France and Italy refused to comply with the terms of the agreement. A World Disarmament Conference, convened at Geneva in 1932 under the auspices of the League of Nations, failed to yield concrete results, even though the United States, this time under the leadership of President Herbert Hoover, attempted to have all offensive weapons outlawed, and, failing this, made an effort to at least obtain a sizable reduction in such weapons. Once again, the American proposals fell on deaf ears in a world increasingly beset by social, political, and economic problems. One history was to sum up the overall situation in these words:

America had entered the postwar period with hopeful visions of a new world order in which reason, logic, and disarmament would pave the way toward world peace. But the unsettled problems and bitterness of the Versailles Peace Conference provided anything but the proper milieu for the entertainment of such thoughts. The world was in ferment, but America slept, trusting in diplomacy and disarmament to protect her from a cruel and implacable fate.⁶

It was the fate of the United States to emerge on the international scene as a dominant power at the very time that the problems of the major nations cried

for a solution that even an older and more experienced country might have been able to mediate only with great difficulty. World War I had brought forth only bitter fruit for victors and vanquished alike and the balance of power that had existed prior to 1914 had largely vanished. It was succeeded by new forms of government and tenuous alliances more often engaged in as fleeting expediences rather than solutions of a more permanent nature. Seemingly abounding in material wealth, possessed by a sharp sense of business, and dwarfing the Old World powers with her sheer physical size and enormous resources, the appearance of the young giant on the world scene, and particularly in the sphere of diplomacy, was greeted by her elders with a mixture of amusement, admiration, envy, and scorn. Few could deny President Wilson's sincerity in putting forward his Fourteen Points aimed at restoring stability to a troubled postwar world. Even fewer could question the honesty of the attempts made by Presidents Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover in forestalling a general world armaments race that sooner or later was bound to result in a shooting war that once again might engulf one nation after another. Yet, in assessing its own political aspirations on the international scene, a nation embarked on pursuit of its national destiny, real or imagined, could not help but feel a sense of frustration and irritation at the continuous American efforts that could well be considered as direct or indirect interference in the affairs of others. No matter how well meant or inspired the American quest for world

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 392.

peace, the very honesty and often lack of complexity within these proposals could hardly fail to act as an irritant to those nations that by virtue of age, culture, and social fabric considered themselves somewhat superior to the sometimes clumsy diplomacy of the New World.

On the international scene, fluctuations in American foreign policy occasioned by succeeding administrations that were in themselves reflections of internal developments within the country frequently were misinterpreted by foreign observers. Central and South America were generally regarded as the preserve of the United States, and several small-scale military incursions by U.S. forces into these areas whenever American interests were threatened underscored this point. In other parts of the world, the United States attempted to make available its good offices in mediating disputes, but isolationism within the country failed to furnish the outside world with an image of firmness and resolution, backed by military power.

The isolationism that gripped the United States in the early 1930s in itself was the outgrowth of several factors, all of which combined to imbue Americans with a spirit of withdrawal from the troubles of other nations. The prolonged economic depression with its side effects of widespread discontent further contributed to a public apathy towards external developments underscored by growing public disillusionment with the state of the world in general. As one history dealing with this particular subject matter was to comment:

To many Americans, World War I had been fought in vain; the world had not

been made safe for democracy. There was a growing feeling that wars were engineered by munitions makers so that they might make money. . . . Another factor in the isolationist trend was the failure of the debtors to repay what they had borrowed during World War I. And what made it worse, Americans felt that this money was being used to build up national armaments which would lead to future wars.⁷

The rising number of dictatorships across the globe could also serve as a barometer warning of future trouble in international affairs. By the end of the 1920s a growing number of nations had entrusted their destinies to the hands of "strong men," notably the Soviet Union, Hungary, Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Poland. The trend toward authoritarian forms of government was still gaining ground and the concept of a single-party state that, at the cost of individual freedom, could operate more efficiently in a state of crisis than the parliamentary system, made great inroads. Thus, the six million unemployed in Germany resulting from the Great Depression, played an important part in the rise to power of the National Socialist Party. In Japan, the militarists were also moving into the saddle by degrees, though the Emperor continued to rule supreme. As the evil of totalitarianism spread, the differences between opposing systems became diffused:

Communism and fascism became more clearly movements international in character, each thriving in the fertile soil of popular frustration and social distress, and on fears aroused by the other. After 1933, when the National Socialists took absolute control of Germany, the accumulating crises merged into one supreme crisis: The direct challenge of unbridled

⁷ Barck and Blake, *op. cit.*, p. 551.

organized violence to all that men had tried to achieve in 1919 and had still hoped to achieve in 1925.⁸

Trouble in Europe and Asia was not to be long delayed. In Central Europe, within three years after Adolf Hitler's rise to power, there occurred the German remilitarization of the Rhineland, followed by the annexation of Austria in early 1938 and occupation of the Sudetenland in September of that year under a policy of appeasement by the Western European powers. Within six months of the Munich settlement, the Germans occupied the remainder of Bohemia. In September 1939, Hitler launched his fateful attack against Poland, thus ushering in a global conflict of then unheard of dimensions. On the other side of the globe, Japan had launched an attack on Manchuria in September 1931 and by May 1933 had withdrawn from the League of Nations. Italy, under the leadership of Benito Mussolini, launched a war of aggression of its own against Ethiopia and in late 1935 thwarted League action condemning the attack. In 1936 Germany, Italy, and Japan aligned themselves, ostensibly against the threat of Communism, but each with her own separate interests. Both China and Spain represented additional trouble spots, each country engaged in civil war that was fuelled from outside sources. The League of Nations, lacking an effective police force to check the spiralling aggression of the totalitarian powers, proved unable to assert its authority; its role eventually was re-

duced to that of a debating society whose members, when chastized, walked out at will.

During the 1930s, some Americans were watching the increasing trend towards international violence with rising concern, though the country was still in the throes of the Great Depression. Considering the state of the United States' defenses, this concern was only too well justified. In 1933, the then Chief of Staff of the Army, General Douglas MacArthur, estimated "that the United States stood seventeenth in rank among the world's armies."⁹ In order to counter the general apathy towards military preparedness then engulfing the country, several veterans' organizations spoke up in behalf of increased allocations for the armed forces, but theirs was a voice crying in the wilderness in a country still beset by major economic troubles. As to the outlook for bolstering America's armed forces during this period, the situation was bleak:

A new administration would take office in 1933, faced not only with the grim specter of hunger stalking the streets, but also the sound of marching boots in Europe and Asia. The Roosevelt Administration was to fall heir to a depleted military establishment, acute economic distress, and intensified international difficulties.¹⁰

Within the budget-starved military establishment of the United States there existed a force that was lean in numbers but strong in history, tradition, and reputation: the United States Marine Corps. In 1933, the entire Corps consisted of 1,192 officers and 15,343 men. As war clouds gathered over Europe in

⁸ David Thomson, ed. *The Era of Violence, 1898-1945—The New Cambridge Modern History*, vol. xii (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), p. 558, used with permission.

⁹ Bernardo and Bacon, *op. cit.*, p. 401.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 400.

the summer of 1939, this number saw only a nominal increase, though a substantial enlargement was authorized by executive order of 8 September 1939. Specializing in the amphibious assault, the U.S. Marine Corps was to occupy a unique position in World War II. One of the official histories in this series, which discusses the role of Marines prior to and following America's entry into the war in detail, makes this observation:

While his country battled a coalition of enemies, and most of his countrymen in arms were fighting halfway across the globe from him, the Marine trained to meet only one enemy—Japan. As the war moved inexorably onward, the men who flocked to join the Corps in unprecedented numbers were literally and consciously signing up to fight the Japanese. This orientation toward a single enemy and towards one theater, the Pacific, colored every Marine's life in and out of battle

and had an incalculable but undeniably beneficial effect on the combat efficiency of the Fleet Marine Force.¹¹

The development of the Fleet Marine Force in conjunction with the evolution of amphibious doctrine will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapters as a prelude to the account of two of the major amphibious operations undertaken by the U.S. Marine Corps in the Western Pacific. To this end, an understanding of the principles of the amphibious assault and knowledge of the Marine command organization that evolved in the Pacific during World War II, should prove helpful.

¹¹ Henry I. Shaw, Jr. and Major Douglas T. Kane, *Isolation of Rabaul—History of U.S. Marine Corps Operations in World War II*, v. II (Washington: Hist Br, G-3 Div, HQMC, 1963), p. 4, hereafter Shaw and Kane, *Isolation of Rabaul*.

PART II

Fleet Marine Force, Pacific

The Development of FMFPac¹

BACKGROUND²

During World War II, the primary tactic employed by the United States in

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this chapter is derived from: Administrative History of Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, 10Apr44–31Aug45, dtd 15May46, hereafter *FMFPac Administrative History*; Historical Outline of the Development of Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, 1941–1950 (Preliminary), HQMC, n.d., hereafter *The Development of FMFPac*; LtCol Frank O. Hough, Maj Verle E. Ludwig, and Henry I. Shaw, Jr., *Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal—History of U. S. Marine Corps Operations in World War II*, v. I (Washington: HistBr, G-3, HQMC, 1958), hereafter Hough, Ludwig, and Shaw, *Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal*; Henry I. Shaw, Jr., Bernard C. Nalty, and Edwin T. Turnbladh, *Central Pacific Drive—History of U. S. Marine Corps Operations in World War II*, v. III (Washington: HistBr, G-3, HQMC, 1966), hereafter Shaw, Nalty, and Turnbladh, *Central Pacific Drive*; Maj Edwin N. McClellan, *The United States in the World War* (Washington: HistBr, G-3, HQMC, 1968 Reprint of 1920 Edition); General Holland M. Smith and Percy Finch, *Coral and Brass* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949), hereafter Smith and Finch, *Coral and Brass*, used with permission; Jeter A. Isely and Philip Crowl, *The U. S. Marines and Amphibious War, Its Theory, and Its Practice in the Pacific* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), hereafter Isely and Crowl, *U. S. Marines and Amphibious War*; Clyde H. Metcalf, *A History of the United States Marine Corps* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1939), hereafter Metcalf, *A History of the U. S. Marine Corps*; Robert D. Heinl, Jr., *Soldiers of the Sea—The United States Marine Corps, 1775–1962* (Annapolis: United States Naval Institute, 1962), hereafter Heinl, *Soldiers of the Sea*.

² Additional information in this section is derived from: William H. Russell, "The Gen-

the Pacific Theater was the amphibious assault. In photographs, newsreels, and books dealing with the progress of American operations against Japan, there appears the familiar sight of United States Marines wading through the surf to assault a hostile beach or of waves of amphibian tractors approaching enemy-held shores. So closely has the U.S. Marine Corps been identified in the public mind with amphibious warfare that such terms as "The Marines have landed" have long since become a commonly-used phrase in the American vocabulary. Amphibious warfare and amphibious assault, over a period of many years, have assumed a very definite meaning: that of landing a force to wrest islands or other terrain from the enemy, as opposed to uncontested amphibious landings. Generally, the preparedness of the United States to conduct amphibious operations during the early phase of World War II has been conceded to be the result of foresight and planning on the part of the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps.³

In order to obtain a balanced picture of the U.S. Marine Corps, its organization and its tactics in World War II, it

esis of FMF Doctrine: 1879–1899," *Marine Corps Gazette*, v. 35, nos. 4–7 (Apr-July 1951); LtGen Holland M. Smith, "The Development of Amphibious Tactics in the U. S. Navy," in *Marine Corps Gazette*, v. 30, nos. 6–10 (Jun-Oct 1946).

³ Isely and Crowl, *U. S. Marines and Amphibious War*, chaps. 1–2.

becomes necessary to follow the evolution of that service since its inception. The tradition of Marines serving on board ships and landing on foreign shores dates back to the Revolutionary War. Throughout the Nineteenth Century, as occasion demanded and as dictated by the expanding interests of the United States, Marines distinguished themselves in operations on the seas or on foreign soil. Their exploits became legend at home and abroad; their existence and immediate availability in time of need became a factor in the foreign policy of the United States. To those viewing this country with unfriendly eyes, they became a force to be reckoned with.

Even though, from the very inception of the Corps, ship-based Marines had made landings on enemy soil, real interest in amphibious warfare, as the term has since become widely known, did not develop until the Spanish-American War. At that time, both in Cuba and in the Philippines, a military force was needed to accompany the fleet to seize and hold advanced bases.⁴ Once this requirement had been established, The General Board of the Navy recommended the activation of a permanent base force. In November 1901, the Secretary of the Navy ordered the Commandant of the Marine Corps to organize a battalion for such advance base work. Instruction of Marines in this special activity began in 1902 at Newport, Rhode Island and Annapolis, Maryland. The training covered field fortifications, transportation of guns, construction of telegraph and telephone lines, and the planting of land mines. Of necessity, it

was limited in scope, since the Marine Corps was fully occupied with other commitments abroad. Amphibious landing exercises were not held until 1914. Advance base training was shifted to New London, Connecticut in 1910 and to Philadelphia a year later. There it remained until 1920, when the activity moved to Quantico, Virginia.

During World War I, the Marine Corps gained little combat experience in advance base warfare despite the existence of an Advance Base Force of more than 6,000 officers and men. The big battles of that war were fought on *terra firma* by large land armies locked for weeks or months in trench warfare that featured little movement. As in the past, Marines distinguished themselves on the battlefield, but the war they waged was that of the foot soldier. Since armies tend to refight battles of a previous war in peacetime in anticipation of the next conflict, instruction in the years following World War I emphasized the Army-type of fighting that had become the trademark of that war. As a result, emphasis in those years was on land warfare at the expense of amphibious training.

Another reason for a lack of interest in amphibious warfare in the immediate post-World War I years was the dismal experience of the British in launching their ill-fated Dardanelles-Gallipoli operation in 1915. The general conclusion among military strategists at the time was that large scale amphibious opera-

⁴For a detailed account of Marine involvement in shaping the concept of amphibious warfare, see Hough, Ludwig, and Shaw, *Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal*, Pt. I.

tions against a defended shore were comparable to a "Charge of the Light Brigade," particularly if such an assault were attempted in the daytime. Still, there were others who did not share this pessimism. The subject of amphibious landings was discussed in the Annual Report of the Commandant of the Marine Corps in 1921. At the same time, a then unknown student at the Naval War College at Newport, Rhode Island, Major Holland M. Smith, began to expound his views on behalf of the role he envisioned for the Marine Corps of the future in the realm of amphibious warfare.⁵

During the immediate postwar period, the voices raised in support of the feasibility of amphibious warfare were crying in the wilderness. By mid-1921, at a time of isolationism and retrenchment, the strength of the U.S. Marine Corps diminished to 1,087 officers and 21,903 enlisted men,⁶ a figure that was to drop even lower during the late 1920s and early 1930s. In the wake of demobilization the entire Corps was suffering from a letdown that invariably follows the return of a military organization to peacetime conditions. Most of the men who had signed up for the emergency had returned to their civilian pursuits. Many wartime officers had left the service and wholesale demotions in rank had become necessary, while recruiting was slow. The status of the officers who re-

mained was uncertain and, as with the other Services, retrenchment and budgetary restrictions obscured the peacetime mission and status of the Corps.

Postwar economy and public apathy subjected the Marine Corps and the other Services to severe limitations in men and resources, notwithstanding the fact that Marines were deployed in the Caribbean and later in Central America on peace-keeping missions that occasionally extended to fighting brushfire wars. The lean years, which were to extend to the very eve of World War II, placed severe restrictions on the scope of Corps operations, yet the maxim that "necessity is the mother of invention" once again proved its validity during this period. Lack of manpower and equipment forced Marines to concentrate on intellectual pursuits, primarily that of defining their mission and planning ahead for the future. At times, bigness tends to stifle initiative; lacking all but the most elementary resources, Marines relied on improvisation that, despite some manifest disadvantages, was to serve them well in the years to come.⁷

Two factors combined to bring about a gradual reversal of the negative thinking regarding amphibious operations. One resulted from the Five-Power Washington Conference of 1921-1922, which put an end to the further fortifi-

⁵ Smith and Finch, *Coral and Brass*, pp. 47-54.

⁶ *Historical Statistics of the United States—Colonial Times to 1957* (Washington: Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, GPO, 1961), hereafter *U. S. Historical Statistics*.

⁷ Recalling this period many years later, one Marine was to comment: "Prior to World War II, the Marine Corps was a great "make do" outfit despite extremely limited means. Where else could you find men who, after four years, shipped over for PFC?" Col R. M. Baker ltr to Head, Hist Br, G-3 Div, HQMC, dtd 21Jul69, in *FMFPac History Comment File*.

cation of naval bases in the Pacific west of the Hawaiian Islands; the other was the emergence of the Japanese presence in the Pacific, one of the consequences of the Treaty of Versailles, the bitter fruits of which were not to be confined to Europe alone. Having jumped on the Allied bandwagon just in time in World War I, Japan was free to consolidate and expand her foothold in the Central and Western Pacific.

Among the first to recognize that expansion-minded Japan might well become a major adversary in any future war was Major Earl H. Ellis, a Marine Corps officer who by 1921 foresaw the possibility that the United States some day would have to seize bases from Japan in the Marshall, Caroline, and Palau Islands.⁸ Though high-ranking Marines, including the Commandant, Major General John A. Lejeune, shared his views, little concrete planning could be accomplished at the time. Major Ellis went on to write an ingenious plan for "Advanced Base Operations in Micronesia," which was to become a partial blueprint for American operations in the Central Pacific 20 years later during World War II. But Major Ellis was far ahead of his time and was destined to perish obscurely in the Palaus—either on a personal or semi-official reconnaissance—before his seeds could fall on fertile soil.

⁸ As a captain prior to World War I, Ellis had already written on "The Security of Advanced Bases and Advanced Base Operations" (IntelSec, DivOps and Trng Files, HistDiv, HQMC).

CREATION OF THE FLEET MARINE FORCE⁹

During the early 1920s, the Marine Corps involvement with amphibious warfare very gradually gained ground, though a number of years were to elapse before it became the Corps' primary mission. In 1921, the Advance Base Force at Quantico was superseded by the Marine Corps Expeditionary Force. Emphasis was on support of the fleet and in 1924 and 1925 this force took part in extensive maneuvers in the Caribbean and in Hawaii. By 1927, a Joint Army-Navy Board recommended that the Marine Corps, in keeping with its close association with the Navy, be given special preparation for the conduct of amphibious warfare.

Thus was laid the groundwork for what was to become the main occupation of the Corps. But the road from recommendation to concrete planning to actual implementation was a rocky and tortuous one, and in the late 1920s a clear definition of the primary Corps mission was still lacking. By this time, large Leatherneck contingents were stationed abroad, notably in Nicaragua and China. Neither funds nor personnel were available for the creation of an amphibious force as envisioned by some of the far-sighted Marine commanders. Once again, internal and external developments lent a helping hand to the budding amphibious force. The year 1929

⁹ Additional material in this section is derived from: MajGen John H. Russell, "The Birth of the FMF," *U. S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, v. 2, no. 515 (Jan 1946).

saw a significant reduction in the number of Marines on foreign service; by early 1933 the last contingent had left Nicaragua.

Major General John H. Russell, who commanded the Marine Corps at the time, took the initiative in approaching the Chief of Naval Operations with a plan that would supplant the Expeditionary Force Staff at Quantico with a "Fleet Base Defense Force" or "Fleet Marine Force." Under the new concept espoused by the Commandant, this force would not be subject to continuous interruption in training through detachment or diversion to other tasks. It was visualized that the new force would become an integral unit within the Fleet under operational control of the Commander in Chief, U. S. Fleet. General Russell's recommendations were approved and thus was created on 7 December 1933 the Fleet Marine Force¹⁰ with headquarters at Quantico, Virginia, an event that was to be described as perhaps "the most significant development within the Marine Corps."¹¹

Immediately following the establishment of the 3,000-man Fleet Marine Force, the Marine Corps Schools at Quantico prepared an amphibious operations manual which set forth a philosophy of command relations, modern concepts, and techniques for a controlled ship-to-shore movement; possible means of ship-to-shore communications; doctrines for air support and naval gunfire;

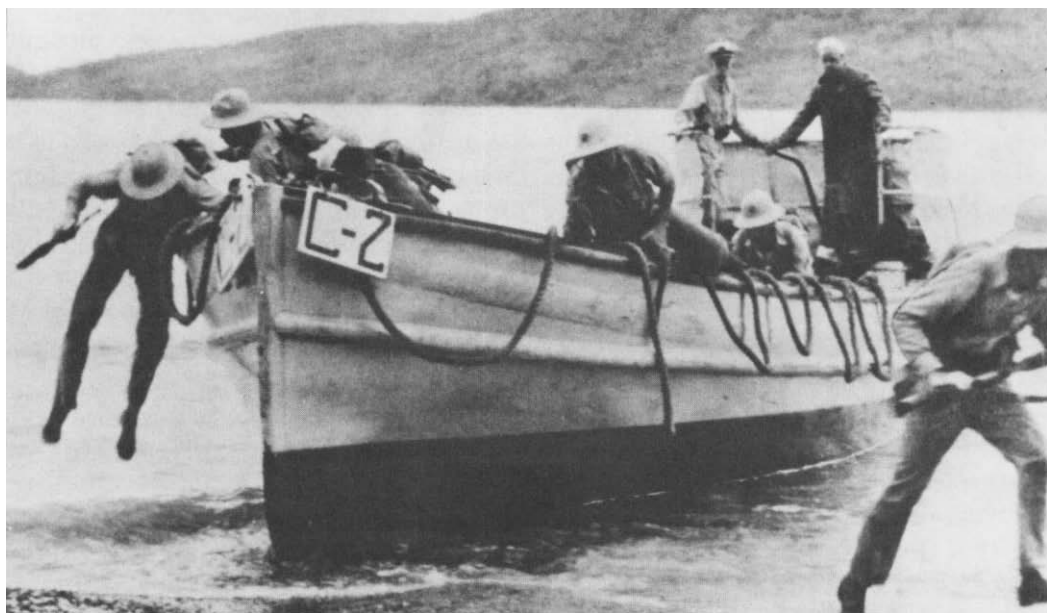
combat loading of troops and supplies; and basics of shore party organization. The finished guide was introduced as the *Tentative Landing Operations Manual*. Within four years, the manual was to be adopted by the Navy as official doctrine for all landing operations. Subsequently, with additional modifications, it also emerged as an Army Field Manual.

In September 1935, Headquarters, Fleet Marine Force moved from Quantico to San Diego. At the same time, the Fleet Marine Force was organized into two brigades. The 1st Brigade was stationed at Quantico, while the 2d moved to the Marine Corps Base, San Diego. In order to have available an organization that could cope with the testing of equipment that was to be used for amphibious warfare, a Marine Corps Equipment Board was established at Quantico, which subsequently was instrumental in the development of the amphibian tractor.

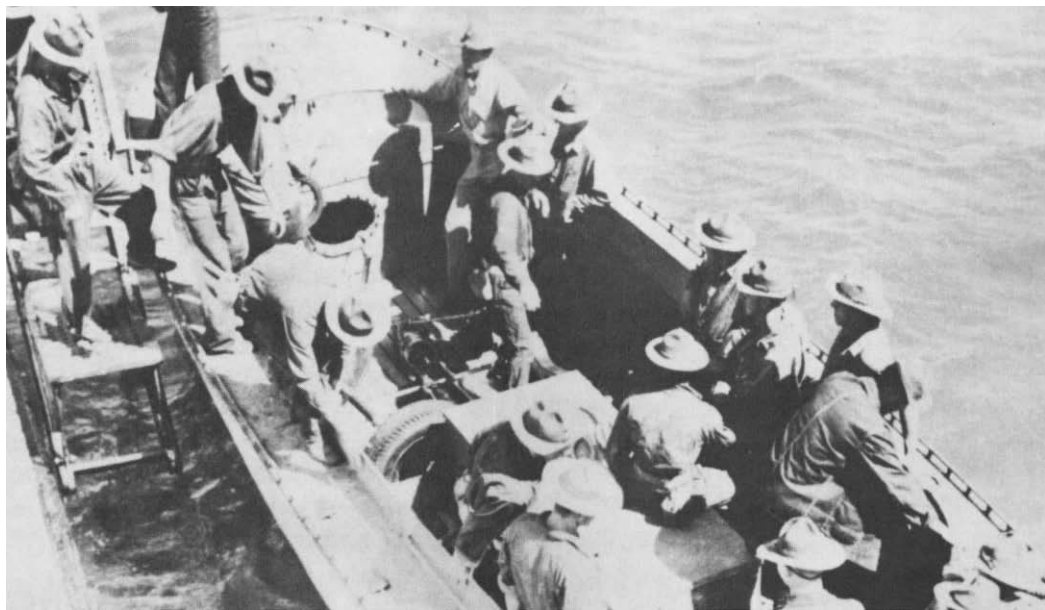
Beginning in February 1934, units of the Fleet Marine Force took part in the annual maneuvers of the U. S. Fleet. In the Pacific, such maneuvers were held off the coast of California, in Hawaii, and at Midway, while similar landing exercises in the Atlantic were conducted in the Caribbean. In 1936 and again in 1938, elements of the U. S. Army participated in some of the exercises, but in 1939 the Army declined to take part, thus for all practical purposes leaving the field of amphibious warfare entirely in the hands of the Marine Corps. Along with the refinement in landing techniques during the late 1930s came the introduction of suitable vessels that

¹⁰ Navy Dept GO No. 241, as cited in *The Development of FMFPac*, pp. 6-7.

¹¹ Metcalf, *A History of the U. S. Marine Corps*, p. 550.



AMPHIBIOUS EXERCISES at Culebra, Puerto Rico, 1936. (USMC 529463)



MARINES in steel Higgins boat, 1939. (USMC 526331)

would move an assault force from the troop transports to its objective. Following extensive experimentation and controversy, Higgins-designed landing craft were found to be best suited to this purpose, and their manufacture in large numbers was initiated.

When World War II broke out in Europe in September 1939, the Marine Corps, with a strength of less than 20,000 men, already had laid a sound basis for its subsequent expansion. This got under way when President Roosevelt proclaimed a state of limited national emergency and, in keeping with a general expansion of the armed forces, increased Marine Corps strength to 25,000. While the war in Europe ran its course and a victorious German Army overran Poland, Denmark, Norway, the Low Countries, and finally France—in the end placing Great Britain under threat of imminent invasion—the Marine Corps continued to train for a war in which the United States might eventually become involved.

In the autumn of 1940, the 1st Marine Brigade departed from Quantico for Cuba and subsequently underwent extensive amphibious training in the West Indies. On 1 February 1941, the newly organized 7th Marines joined the 1st Brigade at Culebra, where the two combined units were designated as the 1st Marine Division, commanded by Holland M. Smith, who up to this time had headed the 1st Marine Brigade.

In the course of the landing exercises conducted by the division, various types of landing craft and new tank and artillery lighters were tested. The boats employed to bring the Marines ashore were totally unsuitable in high surf, such as

existed off Culebra, as were the Navy tank lighters tested. On the other hand, the Higgins boat, which made its first appearance during 1940, had much to recommend it and, according to General Smith, "this craft, in my opinion, did more to help win the war in the Pacific than any other single piece of equipment. . . . Without it our landings on Japanese-held beaches in large numbers would have been unthinkable."¹²

Also on 1 February 1941, the 2d Brigade was designated the 2d Marine Division. It is interesting to note that at the very threshold of the greatest expansion the Marine Corps had even seen, the Fleet Marine Force was temporarily disbanded. This development resulted from war plans that called for the establishment of a two-divisional expeditionary force with each fleet for the specific purpose of carrying out amphibious assaults as required. These amphibious forces were to be further supplemented by an additional division per fleet obtained from the Army and to be trained by the Marines. Upon the recommendation of the Commandant of the Marine Corps, Major General Thomas Holcomb, the 1st and 2d Marine Divisions were assigned to the Atlantic and Pacific Fleets respectively, while the defense battalions of the Fleet Marine Force, which had been created in 1939 for advance base service, were distributed to other commands.

For all practical purposes, the Fleet Marine Force was converted into a training command that would pass on its knowledge and experience to the other Services. In June of 1941, barely

¹² Smith and Finch, *Coral and Brass*, p. 72.

six months before the attack on Pearl Harbor, certain organizational changes occurred. Major General Holland M. Smith on 13 June relinquished command of the 1st Marine Division and became Commanding General of I Corps (Provisional), U. S. Atlantic Fleet, composed of the 1st Marine Division and the Army's 1st Infantry Division. Two weeks later, the organization was redesignated as Task Force 18, U.S. Atlantic Fleet, followed within two days, on 28 July 1941, by a redesignation to the 1st Joint Training Force, U. S. Atlantic Fleet. By mid-August 1941, the title had been changed again to Atlantic Amphibious Force, and in late October of the same year, the organization became the Amphibious Force, Atlantic Fleet. This designation was retained until 3 March 1942, at which time the command received yet another title, that of Amphibious Corps, Atlantic Fleet.¹³ Significantly, regardless of this multitude of titles bestowed upon the organization, there was a continuity of command if not in name, and General Holland Smith continued to preside at each consecutive baptism.

By mid-1941, with war clouds now looming ominously over the Pacific, Marine Corps strength had doubled over that of the preceding year totalling over 54,000.¹⁴ The rapid expansion continued throughout 1941 and skyrocketed after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. By 30 June 1942 the Marine Corps numbered 142,613 officers and men.¹⁵ Even during the period of rapid expansion in

the summer of 1941, no one could surmise the scope of global warfare in which the United States would shortly become involved. Thus, in May of that year the Navy General Board, in dealing with the expansion of the Marine Corps, concluded that:

The composition, organization and strength of the Marine Division as submitted to the General Board by the U. S. Marine Corps appear to be satisfactory for the overseas landing operations to be required of Marine Corps ground troops. The question as to the number of Marine Divisions necessary has been fully discussed and while it appears that a major war conducted in both the Atlantic and Pacific might require three Marine Divisions, most of the probable operations incident to the seizure of any one outlying overseas base probably can be carried through successfully with one Marine Division fully supported as it would be by a Naval Attack Force.¹⁶

The global commitment of the Marine Corps was to go far beyond the strength contemplated in early 1941, but at the time a steady increase in strength over a protracted period of time was envisioned. Hand in hand with the augmentation of the Corps went the enlargement of existing bases and acquisition of new ones. One of these on the East Coast was the New River base in North Carolina, later to become Camp Lejeune; another was the Marine air station at Cherry Point, North Carolina. On the West Coast, Camp Holcomb, subsequently renamed Camp Elliott, came into being. Early in the year, the first planes of the 2d Marine Aircraft Group were sta-

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 82-83.

¹⁴ *U. S. Historical Statistics*, p. 736.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Report of General Board on Expansion of U. S. Marine Corps, G. B. No. 432, Serial No. 139, dtd 7 May 1941, in *Organization and Expansion of the USMC, 1940s* (OAB, NHD).

tioned on Oahu at Ewa.¹⁷ Marine defense battalions at the outbreak of the war were stationed on Midway, Palmyra, and Johnston Islands, and on Wake. Other detachments held forward outposts in the Pacific in American Samoa, at Subic Bay, Luzon, and in the Aleutians.

As the expansion of the armed forces of the United States continued and was further accelerated during 1942, a concept was adopted which charged the Army with primary responsibility in the Atlantic, while the Navy was to reign in the Pacific. As a result of this concept, amphibious training activities on the East Coast of the United States generally became the responsibility of the Army, while similar activities on the West Coast were assigned to the Marine Corps. In line with this thinking, the 2d Joint Training Force had been created on 1 November 1941 at Camp Elliott near San Diego. This force had been planned as a joint Marine-Army training organization, paralleling General Holland Smith's setup on the East Coast. There were similar gyrations in name and title to those the Marine establishment on the East Coast had experienced. On 10 February 1942, Major General Clayton B. Vogel's command became the Amphibious Force, U. S. Pacific Fleet, to be rechristened as Amphibious Corps, Pacific Fleet, less than two months later. (See Chart 1.) Effective 3 August 1942, General Vogel, who up to this time had also acted as the senior Fleet Marine Force commander at San Diego, was placed in command

of all Fleet Marine Force units, both ground and air, in the 11th Naval District.

*WORLD WAR II EXPANSION*¹⁸

By mid-1942 it had become apparent that predominance of the Army on the East Coast had deprived the Amphibious Training Staff, Fleet Marine Force, of the lion's share of its training mission in the Atlantic or the Caribbean. At the same time, developments in the Pacific Theater left very little doubt that the offensive in the South Pacific would be based on large-scale amphibious warfare, all or most of which would be carried out by the Marine Corps. As a consequence of this shift in strategic emphasis, General Smith and his Amphibious Training Staff, Fleet Marine Force, departed from Quantico in September of 1942 and proceeded to San Diego. There, the Amphibious Training Staff was disbanded and its personnel assigned to Headquarters, Amphibious Corps, Pacific Fleet. At the same time, General Smith took over as Commander of the Amphibious Corps and as Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force, San Diego Area. General Vogel, who had been displaced by the arrival of General Smith, took charge of the I Marine Amphibious Corps (IMAC) at San Diego, a unit whose staff was composed largely of personnel who had previously served with General Vogel on the staff of the Amphibious Corps, Pacific Fleet. Shortly thereafter, General Vogel left

¹⁷ The growth of Marine Corps aviation and the evolution of its command organization will be dealt with in a separate chapter.

¹⁸ Additional material in this section is derived from: BGen D.A.D. Ogden (AUS), "Amphibious Operations," Reprint of Lecture at the U. S. Army Engineer School, Ft. Belvoir, Va., 15Mar49.

GENEALOGY OF FLEET MARINE FORCE, PACIFIC

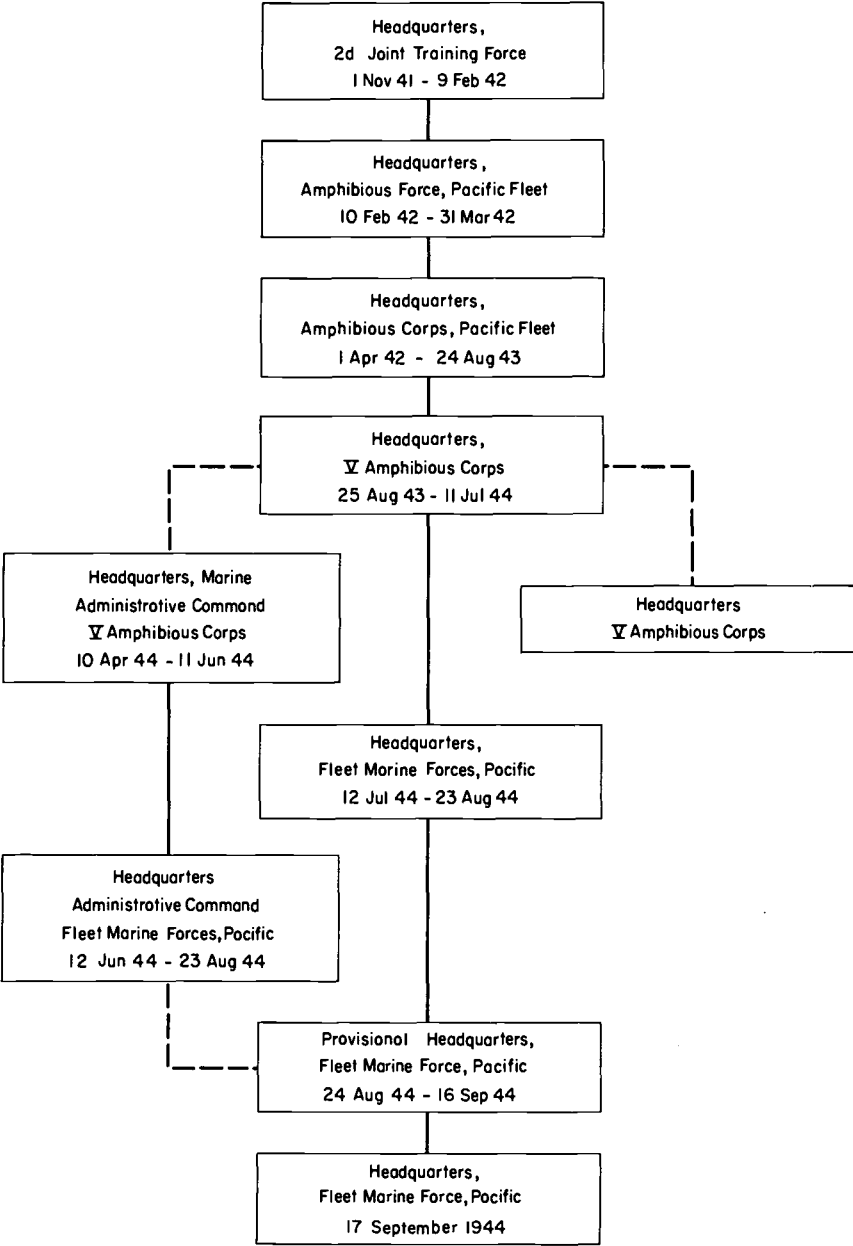


CHART 1

K. W. White

the West Coast to assume command of the IMAC in the South Pacific.

Despite the tortuous and somewhat confusing road that the Marine Corps command organization had travelled, an effective command organization was beginning to emerge by the middle of 1942, though many difficulties remained to be overcome. In his capacity as Commanding General, Amphibious Corps, Pacific Fleet, General Smith was responsible for the organization and training of Fleet Marine Force units as they became available for employment with the Amphibious Force, Pacific Fleet. At the same time, in his dual capacity as Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force, San Diego Area, General Smith was charged with the administration of training activities at San Diego, Camp Pendleton, and Camp Dunlap, as well as command of Fleet Marine Force units that were not specifically assigned to the Corps. Since the Amphibious Corps was a joint command and consisted of U. S. Army as well as Marine units, its primary mission for a number of months was to train Army units, specifically for operations in the Aleutians.

Meanwhile, American troops were pouring into the Pacific Area in ever increasing numbers, making it necessary for the I Marine Amphibious Corps, originally planned only as an administrative command for Marine units, to assume tactical functions. By late 1943, augmentation of the Pacific Fleet and availability of manpower made possible the initiation of the Central Pacific offensive, whose purpose was to strike out westward across the Pacific along the most direct route to Japan. Pursuant to this mission, Vice Admiral Raymond

A. Spruance became commander of the Central Pacific Force and the Fifth Fleet. In August 1943, the Fifth Amphibious Force was organized under Rear Admiral Richmond K. Turner, and later that month the Amphibious Corps, Pacific Fleet, was redesignated as the V Amphibious Corps (VAC), with General Holland Smith in command.

Even though the newly-created VAC directly succeeded the Amphibious Corps, Pacific Fleet, there was a major difference in its mission, which became a dual one. First, the organization was to constitute an administrative command with control of Marine units in the Central Pacific. Secondly, it had the tactical mission of directing amphibious assaults of both Marine and U. S. Army troops. At the time of these administrative changes, the new organization turned over its responsibility for amphibious training on the West Coast of the United States to a newly established Troop Training Unit, Amphibious Training Command, Pacific Fleet. In September 1943, VAC moved to Hawaii, where preparations were then in full swing for the invasion of the Gilbert Islands.

It soon became apparent that the organizational expedient that had been sought in establishing such a multitude of organizations whose missions were bound to overlap would not be a happy one. In the words of one history dealing with this organizational maze:

Assumption of tactical functions by Amphibious Corps headquarters gave rise once again to the problem of conduct of administrative matters of Fleet Marine Force units in the Pacific. Now two parallel echelons functioned directly with Headquarters, Marine Corps while performing duplicate administrative activities

with respect to subordinate units. It became necessary to divorce tactical elements from administrative elements during operations, hence the formation of rear echelons of substantial size for each amphibious corps headquarters.¹⁹

The Joint Chiefs of Staff had decided as early as 1942 to split command in the Pacific Theater between the Southwest Pacific Area under General MacArthur and the Pacific Ocean Areas under Admiral Nimitz. Until 1944, most FMF units had served in the Southwest Pacific under MacArthur, but the new Central Pacific drive demanded trained amphibious troops and the Navy wanted Marines for the assault role. Effective 25 March 1944, the I Marine Amphibious Corps passed to the command of Admiral Nimitz, who now controlled it in addition to the V Amphibious Corps.

General Holland Smith, who had just received his promotion to lieutenant general, recognized that the time was ripe for a reorganization of the Marine command structure under the new setup in the Central Pacific. He recommended the creation of Headquarters, Amphibious Troops, Pacific, to include I Marine Amphibious Corps, II Marine Amphibious Corps, an Army Corps, along with Defense Troops, Expeditionary Troops Artillery, and the Service of Supply, Amphibious Troops Pacific. The new organization, which for all practical purposes constituted a field army, would be divided into two echelons: an administrative rear headquarters in Hawaii to take care of administrative and logistical matters, and a forward headquarters

to command and direct amphibious assaults.²⁰

On 29 March 1944 the Commander in Chief, United States Fleet, authorized the Commanding General, VAC, to exercise, as an additional duty, complete administrative control and logistical responsibility for all Fleet Marine Force units committed for operations in the Central Pacific.²¹ General Alexander A. Vandegrift, who had been appointed as Commandant of the Marine Corps on 1 January, was on an inspection tour in Hawaii when the above authorization arrived and on this occasion proposed the establishment of an Administrative Command, VAC. The latter was to function just below VAC with responsibility for the administrative work of all Pacific Fleet Marine Force units concerning supply, evacuation, sanitation, construction, salvage, personnel management, quartering and general supervision of censorship. Further, it was to handle the command and administration of all Fleet Marine Force units in the Pacific which remained at bases during combat operations or which were assigned by the Commanding General, VAC. Finally, the Administrative Command was to supervise the routine administrative activity of units that would normally be handled by the rear echelon of the Corps headquarters.

Admiral Nimitz expressed his belief that the efficiency of both the administration of Marine units in the Pacific Ocean Areas and the logistic support of

¹⁹ *FMFPac Administrative History*, p. 11.

²⁰ Smith and Finch, *Coral and Brass*, p. 154.

²¹ CominCh ltr ser 001015, dtd 29Mar44 as cited in *FMFPac Administrative History*, p. 11.

their combat operations would be greatly improved by the measures proposed by General Vandegrift, except that he desired the new organization to be designated as the V Amphibious Corps Marine Administrative Command in order to avoid any misconception that the functions assigned to the new organization would affect such Army units as were assigned or attached to VAC. The Commandant's recommendations were put into effect without further delay and on 10 April 1944, the Marine Administrative Command, VAC, was activated.²²

Under the reorganization, the newly created unit consisted of Headquarters, Marine Administrative Command, VAC, and Marine Supply Service, VAC. At the same time that the organizational changes became effective, the Commanding General, I Marine Amphibious Corps, was relieved of his administrative functions, retaining only those of a tactical nature, unless otherwise directed by the Commanding General, VAC. Under the new setup, the functions of the Supply Service, IMAC and those of the Marine Supply Service, VAC, were consolidated.

While the above reorganization and consolidation no doubt were steps in the right direction, it soon became evident that additional changes were necessary as a consequence of the constantly changing tactical situation in the Pacific Theater. By April 1944 the Fleet Marine Force units in the theater consisted of four divisions, a brigade which

lacked only a regimental combat team in order to constitute a full division, corps troops and a steadily expanding Supply Service. The 5th Marine Division was still being trained and equipped in the Continental United States, but its arrival in the theater was also expected around the turn of 1944–1945.

During 1944, imminent operations in the Marianas made the establishment of an overall Marine Command in the Pacific highly desirable, if not imperative. Since operations in the Marianas were to be carried out in two major phases—an attack against Saipan and Tinian in the north, followed by the assault against Guam farther south, two task forces would be necessary. One of these was the Northern Attack Force under Vice Admiral Richmond Kelly Turner, who also led the Joint Expeditionary Force. The Southern Attack Force came under Rear Admiral Richard L. Connolly. General Holland Smith was to wear two hats during the operations, for he was to serve as Commanding General, Expeditionary Troops and at the same time as Commanding General, Northern Troops and Landing Force. Major General Roy S. Geiger, commanding the III Amphibious Corps (IIIAC), a new title for IMAC, was to command the Southern Troops and Landing Force in the assault on Guam.²³ In order for General Smith to exercise tactical command in both IIIAC and VAC, a higher headquarters had to be organized. Prior to the landings, VAC thus had to set up

²² VAC GO No. 53–44, dtd 6Apr44, as cited in *FMFPac Administrative History*, p. 14.

²³ The redesignation which became effective on 15 April 1944, reflected the fact that the corps, like VAC, was a command including troops of all Services, not just Marines.

two tactical staffs. Organization of the staff took place at Pearl Harbor on 12 April 1944, on the same date that the Marine Administrative Command was formed. For all practical purposes, a Headquarters, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific was now in existence in all respects except for the name.

Events occurring during the spring of 1944 were designed to correct this deficiency. On 27 May 1944, the Commander in Chief, U. S. Fleet queried the Commander in Chief, U. S. Pacific Fleet with respect to the desirability of creating a Headquarters, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific Ocean Areas, under General Holland Smith. In reply, Admiral Nimitz expressed his concurrence and recommended that the change become effective upon completion of the assault phase of the campaign in the Marianas. As far as the organizational structure was concerned, Admiral Nimitz recommended that the Fleet Marine Force, Pacific Ocean Areas, consist of a headquarters with the IIIAC, the VAC, and the Administrative Command, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific Ocean Areas, as subordinate units.

Following the above discussions, on 5 June 1944 Admiral King designated the Commanding General, VAC, as the type commander for all Fleet Marine Force ground units in the Pacific Ocean Areas effective that date. He further specified that, as ordered by the Commander in Chief, U. S. Pacific Fleet, a Headquarters, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, be established under the command of General Holland Smith. The Marine Administrative Command, VAC, was to be re-

designated as Administrative Command, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific.²⁴

Since at the time General Holland Smith was participating in the Saipan-Tinian campaign as Commanding General, VAC, the Commander in Chief, Pacific Ocean Areas directed that in his absence the Commanding General, Marine Administrative Command, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, assume additional duty as Deputy Commander, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific. Upon his return from the Marianas, General Smith assumed command of Fleet Marine Force, Pacific. On 24 August 1944 Headquarters, Administrative Command, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, was redesignated Provisional Headquarters, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific.²⁵ Subordinate units of the Administrative Command, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific were redesignated units of Fleet Marine Force, Pacific. Headquarters and Service Battalion, Administrative Command, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, also underwent a change in that it became Provisional Headquarters and Service Battalion, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific.

Presumably, the term "provisional" was inserted in the titles of Force Headquarters and Force Headquarters and Service Battalion because it had previously been stipulated that the Administrative Command would continue to function as a separate entity under Headquarters, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific. Instead, the Provisional Headquarters, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific

²⁴ *FMFPac Administrative History*, p. 15.

²⁵ FMFPac SpecO No. 2-44, dtd 23Aug44.

now assumed those functions previously assigned to the Administrative Command.

Within a week, there was to be a further change in the round of redesignations and reorganizations. On 31 August 1944, the Commandant ordered the abolition of the Administrative Command and organization of the Fleet Marine Force, Pacific. At the same time an organizational chart was drawn up listing as components of the Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, the FMFPac Headquarters Troops, III Amphibious Corps, V Amphibious Corps, FMF Air Pacific, Force Artillery, Force Antiaircraft Artillery, Force Amphibian Tractor Group, Force Reserve, FMF Supply Service, Force Service Troops, FMF Transient Center, and Marine units under island commands for administration only.²⁶ In line with this authority from CMC, Headquarters, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, and Headquarters and Service Battalion, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific were formally activated effective 17 September 1944.²⁷

As of this date, the following major elements comprised Fleet Marine Force, Pacific:

Headquarters, Fleet Marine Force,
Pacific
Headquarters, III Amphibious
Corps, and Corps Troops
Headquarters, V Amphibious
Corps, and Corps Troops
1st Marine Division

2d Marine Division
3d Marine Division
4th Marine Division
5th Marine Division
6th Marine Division
Aircraft, Fleet Marine Force,
Pacific, with
1st Marine Aircraft Wing
2d Marine Aircraft Wing
3d Marine Aircraft Wing
4th Marine Aircraft Wing
Marine Fleet Aircraft, West
Coast

1st 155mm Howitzer Battalion
2d 155mm Howitzer Battalion
3d 155mm Howitzer Battalion
4th 155mm Howitzer Battalion
5th 155mm Howitzer Battalion
7th 155mm Gun Battalion
8th 155mm Gun Battalion
9th 155mm Gun Battalion
10th 155mm Gun Battalion
11th 155mm Gun Battalion
12th 155mm Gun Battalion
1st Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion
2d Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion
3d Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion
4th Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion
5th Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion
7th Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion
8th Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion
9th Antiaircraft Artillery
Battalion, Reinforced
10th Antiaircraft Artillery
Battalion
11th Antiaircraft Artillery
Battalion
12th Antiaircraft Artillery
Battalion
14th Antiaircraft Artillery
Battalion, Reinforced

²⁶ CMC ltr to CG, FMFPac, Serial 003E23944, dtd 31Aug44.

²⁷ FMFPac GO No. 12-44, dtd 18Sep44.

15th Antiaircraft Artillery
Battalion

16th Antiaircraft Artillery
Battalion

17th Antiaircraft Artillery
Battalion

18th Antiaircraft Artillery
Battalion

52d Defense Battalion, with two
detachments

1st Seacoast Artillery Battalion

1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion

2d Amphibian Tractor Battalion

3d Amphibian Tractor Battalion

4th Amphibian Tractor Battalion

5th Amphibian Tractor Battalion

6th Amphibian Tractor Battalion

8th Amphibian Tractor Battalion

10th Amphibian Tractor Battalion

11th Amphibian Tractor Battalion

1st Armored Amphibian Battalion

2d Armored Amphibian Battalion

3d Armored Amphibian Battalion
(Provisional)

1st Base Headquarters Battalion

3d Base Headquarters Battalion

1st Separate Engineer Battalion

2d Separate Engineer Battalion

Supply Service, Fleet Marine Force,
Pacific, with

1st Field Depot

3d Field Depot

4th Base Depot

5th Field Depot

6th Base Depot

7th Field Depot

8th Field Depot

16th Field Depot

1st Service and Supply Battalion

2d Service and Supply Battalion

3d Service and Supply Battalion
4th Service and Supply Battalion²⁸

The far-reaching changes in the organizational structure of the Marine Corps found their echo in the status of the Fleet Marine Force aviation units in the Pacific, which also was subject to modification. On 7 September 1944, General Vandegrift acted on instructions received from Admiral King and ordered deletion of FMF Air Pacific from the initial organizational chart of 31 August, leaving the command status of aviation units to be clarified at a later date. On 16 September, Marine Aircraft Wings, Pacific, was redesignated as Aircraft, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific.

A final decision on the status of the aviation units of the Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, was reached on 11 October 1944 in Pacific Fleet Letter 53L-44, which also regulated the status of FMFPac. Accordingly, the Commanding General, FMFPac, was a type commander for all units comprising his command and in this capacity came under the direct command of the Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet. He had responsibility for the overall administration and supply of all subordinate units, except for aviation supplies. He was charged with coordinating the activities of the Fleet Marine Force; establishing policies relating to its organization, maintenance, and support; issuing directives for its training, operations, administration, and supply, except for the operation of aircraft. Further, he was to keep the Commander

²⁸ *FMFPac Administrative History*, pp.113-114.

in Chief, Pacific Fleet, informed of matters affecting the readiness or operating capabilities of subordinate units; allocate and distribute personnel; and exercise operational control of all FMF units (except aviation) unless they were otherwise assigned. In addition to the above, the Commanding General, FMFPac was to act as advisor to the Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet and Pacific Ocean Areas on matters pertaining to the Marine Corps in general and on amphibious operations. He was to study and keep abreast of the strategic situation and make recommendations for the employment of the Fleet Marine Force. Finally, he was to command a task force in combat operations when directed to do so.²⁹

With reference to the aviation units, the same letter spelled out the status of Aircraft, FMFPac. The latter organization was defined as a major unit of FMFPac. Its Commanding General was charged with performing type-command functions under the Commanding General, FMFPac within the latter's field of responsibility. In aviation matters, the Commanding General, Aircraft, FMFPac, was to perform type-command functions under the Commander, Air Force, Pacific Fleet. Operational control of Aircraft, FMFPac tactical units was to remain with the Commander, Air Force, Pacific Fleet, unless such units were otherwise assigned.

Even though the letter more clearly spelled out the mission and responsibilities of FMFPac, and as such signified a large step forward for the Marine Corps command structure, it still fell short of

one objective. There now existed an amphibious organization in the Pacific which had come a very long way from the basic structure that had existed at the time of the Pearl Harbor attack. Nevertheless, the new establishment still had not attained the status of a tactical field army type of headquarters that General Smith had envisioned and proposed in March 1944 and which the Commandant had previously endorsed. A gap in the doorway had been opened through the provision that the Commanding General, FMFPac, could at times act as a task force commander in combat operations, but at this stage the door was still far from ajar.

In November 1944, General Smith submitted proposed tables of organization for his headquarters staff. These proposals rested on the premise that FMFPac would represent a tactical headquarters for a Marine field army of two corps, as well as an administrative headquarters in the rear. In the course of January 1945 these proposals formed the subject of discussion between representatives of General Vandegrift, Admiral Nimitz, and General Smith. When it became apparent that no operations were scheduled calling for the commitment of a Marine field army, and in the light of personnel shortages, it was decided that the staff of Headquarters, FMFPac would be large enough only to take care of the administrative duties, with sufficient additional personnel for inspection parties, observers, and small task force staffs.³⁰

³⁰ *FMFPac Administrative History*, pp. 19-22, 33-34.

²⁹ Pacific Fleet Letter 53L-44, dtd 110ct44.

Assurances were provided that General Holland Smith in his capacity as Commanding General, FMFPac, would retain responsibility for conducting combat operations as a task force commander when directed to do so. In practice, he was able to exercise such command only during the Iwo Jima operation in February–March 1945. Prior to the end of World War II, the status and organizational structure of Headquarters, FMFPac remained essentially unchanged. The only other major change was the redesignation of the Supply Service, FMFPac, as Service Command, FMFPac, which became effective on 1 June 1945.

At the time of the Japanese surrender, FMFPac consisted of the Service Command, FMFPac, the III and V Amphibious Corps, composed of six Marine divisions, and Aircraft, FMFPac consisting of four Marine Aircraft Wings and Marine Fleet Air, West Coast.

The American drive across the Pacific to the doorstep of Japan rendered acute the question of the forward displacement of Headquarters, FMFPac. It was proposed initially to move elements of Headquarters, FMFPac, from Hawaii to Guam in the Marianas. A study of the question brought out the fact that there was a continuing necessity for certain sections of General Smith's headquarters to maintain liaison with Headquarters, Commander in Chief, Pacific. There was an additional requirement for other headquarters sections to advise the Commanding General, FMFPac, in the forward area. Basically, the latter would comprise the personnel who would act as the operating

staff of the Fleet Marine Force in the field.

As of December 1944, it was envisioned that major portions of the G-2 and G-4 Sections, Headquarters, FMFPac, would remain in Hawaii, since the Joint Intelligence Center, POA, and most of the logistical operating sections would also remain there. The Deputy Commander, FMFPac, was to remain at Pearl Harbor, and all staff sections were to be represented on his staff, so that normal administrative functions as an area command could be retained. Since a Field Service Command was already present on Guam, no further displacement of Headquarters, Supply Service, FMFPac, was anticipated.

After a considerable delay resulting from General Holland Smith's participation in the Iwo Jima operation, he recommended to Admiral Nimitz that Headquarters, FMFPac, and Headquarters, Supply Service, FMFPac, displace forward either to Guam or Okinawa once VAC embarked upon its next amphibious operation. General Smith felt that since FMFPac constituted a major element within the Pacific Fleet, the eventual location of his headquarters should depend on that of the Pacific Fleet. In any case, he felt that all of the Fleet Marine Force should in time be located either in the Marianas or further west, in any case at least as far west as Guam.³¹

On 26 April 1945, the Commander in Chief, Pacific Ocean Areas authorized the forward displacement of Administrative Headquarters, FMFPac, to Guam

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 73-74.

subsequent to 1 July. However, inasmuch as the primary function of the Commanding General, FMFPac, was that of an administrative commander, General Smith felt that it would not be feasible for the main body of the administrative staff to remain in Hawaii while he himself relocated to Guam. Since he was divorced from operational duties, the bulk of the daily decisions dealt with questions of personnel and logistics whose solution required immediate access to all of the records retained in Headquarters, FMFPac. The physical separation of the major portion of his staff from these records would, for all practical purposes, strip him of his primary function as administrative commander of FMFPac while delegating the command of that headquarters to the Deputy Commander, FMFPac.

An additional factor mitigating against the forward displacement of FMFPac was the lack of headquarters facilities on Guam. There was a critical shortage of engineers and it was felt while some construction could be completed for subordinate elements of FMFPac with limited space requirements, adequate housing for the Headquarters would not be available on Guam for an indefinite period. In view of this problem, the Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific reversed his thinking as to the forward displacement of his headquarters and requested that his earlier recommendation to this effect be held in abeyance, pending a major change in the overall situation.

In July 1945, following the assumption of the command of FMFPac by Lieutenant General Roy S. Geiger on 3

July, action on the forward move of the headquarters was again initiated. It was tentatively planned that the forward headquarters would consist of the commanding general and a small operating staff and that initially the bulk of the administrative work would be handled in Hawaii under the Deputy Commander, FMFPac. As before, Guam was to serve as the forward location. Initial housekeeping support at the forward headquarters was to be provided by small advance echelons of the Headquarters and Service Battalion, the Signal Battalion, the Marine Detachment (Provisional), Marianas Area, and the Transient Center, Marianas Area. Subsequent echelons were to displace forward over an extended period of time. In order to provide for an uninterrupted handling of the workload, it was anticipated that certain Headquarters files and records would have to be duplicated and that certain special staff sections would have to be combined with appropriate general staff sections at either location.

In response to General Geiger's request, the Commander in Chief, U. S. Pacific Fleet and Pacific Ocean Areas on 19 July 1945 authorized FMFPac to establish an advance headquarters on Guam, to consist of approximately 72 officers and 350 enlisted men. However, it was specified that the Island Commander, Guam, was not in a position to furnish engineering assistance for the construction of the necessary facilities. Despite difficulties that could be expected with reference to office space and quarters, final preparations for the forward displacement were all but completed by early August 1945. The initial

echelon which was to include General Geiger, the Chief of Staff, G-3 Section, and appropriate general and special staff representatives, was slated to be established on Guam on or about 3 September 1945.³² The main body of Headquarters, FMFPac was to remain in Hawaii under the Deputy Commander, FMFPac, as stipulated in the earlier plan.

During the absence of General Geiger, the Deputy Commander was to exercise the former's administrative functions, in addition to controlling and supervising units and the staff groups remaining in Hawaii. The division of staff functions between the forward and rear echelon was to be handled in such a way that operational planning, allocation of troop units, training directives, organization, and troop movements would all be taken care of on Guam while personnel administration, allocation of replacement drafts, intelligence functions, procurement of maps and aerial photographs, supply and evacuation, transportation, and other administrative matters both special and routine would be the responsibility of the Deputy Commander.

The end of the war forestalled the forward displacement of FMFPac, and the headquarters remained at Pearl Harbor.³³ The immediate problems in-

herent in the invasion of Japan, for which planning was well under way by the time of the Japanese surrender, could now be shelved as the uncontested occupation of the Home Islands became a reality. In nearly four years of global warfare, the Marine Corps had succeeded in putting an untried concept of amphibious warfare to the acid test. The evolution of the administrative structure of the FMFPac represented a small but vital link in the chain of events that led from prewar experimentation with the ways and means of amphibious assault on the peaceful shores of islands in the Caribbean to such places as Tarawa, Saipan, Tinian, Guam, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa. To make these assaults feasible required not only vast quantities of materiel and men trained in their use, but also an efficient organization that could assure that both were available when and where needed.

The twists and turns taken during the evolution of the Fleet Marine Force are but a reflection of the ever-changing war situation that called for a highly flexible command organization. Thus, the development of the Fleet Marine Force saw its beginnings before war came to the United States; it was destined to continue long after the last shot had been fired. The lessons of that war, many of them learned by trial and error, were to become an invaluable asset in the overall offensive and defensive capability of the United States, to be available as needed for the use of future generations.

³² FMFPac GO No. 75-45, dtd 30Aug45.

³³ The Japanese surrender voided the imminent move of Headquarters, FMFPac to Guam. Detailed notes pertaining to this move for the period 12-27Aug45 are contained in LtGen Merwin H. Silverthorn ltr to HistBr, G-3 Div, HQMC, dtd 20Jun69, in *FMFPac History Comment File*.

Administration and Aviation¹

ADMINISTRATIVE FUNCTIONS AND CONTACTS

When the guns fell silent in 1945, the time had arrived to take stock and determine where the organizational structure of the Marine Corps had gone during the war years and what direction it would take in the future. The expanded Fleet Marine Force in the summer of 1945 bore little resemblance to the embryo organization that had existed during the early days of World War II, when a few defense units had been scattered among widely separated islands in the Pacific. Within the overall structure of the Marine Corps and the remaining armed forces of the United States, the Fleet Marine Force was not an isolated entity. All of its titles and functions resulted from tactical considerations; in fact, the numerous changes in both were inherently the result of a flexible response to widely varying de-

mands made on the Corps in the course of the evolution of amphibious warfare.

One name that recurs unfailingly during all of World War II in connection with this evolution is that of General Holland M. Smith. This officer, among others, made it his life purpose to perfect amphibious doctrine and organization to a point where both won general acceptance, despite numerous skeptics and critics who still remembered the unsuccessful Allied expedition to the Dardanelles in World War I. The experience of the U.S. Marine Corps in all aspects of amphibious landings during World War II removed that type of warfare once and for all from the sphere of experimentation that had occupied much thought and time of planners during the 1920s and 1930s. It was fortunate that "this tough, egocentric, cantankerous, exacting little Marine general, who became one of the most controversial figures in World War II, provided the main power drive to all amphibious training on the east coast in the crucial year of 1941."² Nor did this drive diminish during the war years, for throughout the war General Smith kept in mind the fundamental reason for the existence of the Fleet Marine Force: the Navy's need for an efficient, highly mobile striking force

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this chapter is derived from: *FMFPac Administrative History; The Development of FMFPac*; Shaw, Nalty, and Turnbladh, *Central Pacific Drive*; Reports of Organization and Expansion of the U. S. Marine Corps during the 1940s (OAB, NHD); Smith and Finch, *Coral and Brass*; Isely and Crowl, *U. S. Marines and Amphibious War*; Heintz, *Soldiers of the Sea*; Robert Sherrod, *History of Marine Corps Aviation in World War II* (Washington: Combat Forces Press, 1952), hereafter, Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*; U. S. *Historical Statistics*.

² Isely and Crowl, *U. S. Marines and Amphibious War*, p. 62.

that was the master of amphibious assault. In assessing the role played by Holland Smith in the evolution of his command and in enumerating some of his personal qualities, one historical account concluded:

Whatever may be the judgment of his contemporaries or of history concerning his role in the Pacific War, there can be little doubt that he played the leading part in forging a fighting amphibious team that made possible the eventual successful landings in both the Atlantic and the Pacific.

General Smith's primary qualifications for the particular job at hand were that he was a driver and a perfectionist. Never did he allow himself the comfortable satisfaction of believing that the training exercises under his direction came off as well as might have been expected under the circumstances and therefore could pass muster. Never did he allow his subordinates in the Navy and Marine Corps or his equals and superiors in the Navy to relax in the drive for perfect planning and execution of all phases of landing operations.³

The very nature of the successively redesignated commands he headed dictated that General Smith should work in close coordination with elements of the other Services. Thus, during the early phase of World War II, he not only supervised the amphibious training of the 1st Marine Division but at the same time initiated the U.S. Army's 1st and 9th Infantry Divisions into the intricacies of amphibious warfare. While this activity was in progress on the East Coast of the United States, the 2d Marine Division and the Army's 3d Infantry Division were similarly trained in California. Once his activities had shifted to the West Coast, General Smith

took over the amphibious training of the 2d Marine Division and the Army's 7th Infantry Division. Almost from the very outset, both the embarkation and debarkation of troops from the vessels then available posed serious problems as did accommodations on the transports themselves. At the time, the Higgins craft with bow ramp remained to be perfected. Once a landing force made it ashore, endless confusion ensued until an effective shore party organization could be established.

Within the scope of any amphibious landing, overall coordination and the quantity and quality of naval gunfire support loomed as ominous factors. The controversy regarding the effectiveness of such support was to flare up here and there across the Pacific throughout the war. In 1941 there were no concrete answers to this question since during the landing exercises held at the time all naval gunfire support was simulated. One problem arising in the course of these exercises was the difficulty of coordinating the efforts of the three Services; the naval shore observation parties were without adequate communications equipment and lacked experience, while Army officers were generally unfamiliar with standard naval signal procedure.⁴

Similar exercises conducted in 1942 resulted in answers to some of these problems only to have new ones crop up, notably in connection with the shore party. In the end, the elements of amphibious training were decentralized so that various centers could devote their full resources to a specified activity. In consequence, special schools to conduct

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

the training of shore fire control parties were set up at Quantico and Parris Island. Transport-loading training was given at Quantico and Norfolk, while both Quantico and Fort Bragg, N. C., provided much needed theoretical and practical instruction in radio code, the operation of message centers, and the fundamentals of joint Army-Navy communications procedure. The effects of this training were to be felt across the globe as the Marine and Army divisions who had absorbed it headed for different theaters of operations.

Along with improvements in training came significant technological developments in the machinery of war that would move amphibious assault troops to their objectives. First came the Higgins boats, which had already been tested and improved during the late 1930s, followed in 1941 by the adoption of the Higgins tank lighters which were to become the standard medium landing craft (LCM) used in amphibious landings throughout World War II. The development of the tracked landing vehicle, subsequently to become known as the LVT, followed a tortuous path similar to that of the Higgins boat. Initially invented for rescue work in the Everglades of Florida, the amphibian tractor first came to the attention of the Marine Corps in the 1930s. In late 1940 the first of the Roebling "Alligators" was demonstrated at Quantico, after which time funds were set aside by the Navy for the large-scale production of this vehicle.

While these developments were in progress, the Marine Corps Equipment Board was working on plans for an armored amphibian vehicle based on

the design of the "Alligator." As this project got under way:

Plans called for a vehicle of over twenty feet in length, twelve feet wide, and six and one half feet high. The hull was to be composed of structural steel, turrets were to be of $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch steel castings and would be operable by hand. Each such vehicle was to be armed with a 37-millimeter gun and one .30 caliber machine gun in the center turret, one .50-caliber machine gun in each side turret, and two fixed .50 caliber machine guns fired by the driver by means of buttons at the top of the two steering levers. Propulsion would be obtained from 4-inch T-shaped curved cleats bolted to roller chains. Roebling accepted the idea with modifications. By November 1940, Marine Corps Headquarters had given approval, and production of the first model armored amphibian (LVTA) was begun.⁵

Also during the early phase of the war, rapid improvements were made in naval gunnery that would assure an assault force effective fire support as it approached and seized an enemy shore. Once again, General Smith, on this occasion with the active support of Admiral Ernest J. King, initiated a general reorganization of the shore fire control party. One of the basic changes adopted was the substitution of a Marine or U. S. Army officer for naval personnel who had previously acted as naval gunfire spotters. Henceforth, specially trained naval officers were to act as liaison officers of the shore fire control party. Signal personnel of the assault units, either Marine or Army, were to be made available to the gunfire spotter. In order to familiarize naval personnel with the problems that an amphibious assault force could expect to

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

face during actual landings, a number of naval gunfire liaison officers were sent to Quantico and Parris Island where they received joint training with Marine artillery officers between September 1941 and March 1942. Artillery officers of the 1st Marine Division received similar training with those of the Army's 9th Infantry Division at Fort Bragg, N. C. around the same period. Eventually the graduates of these courses, though their number remained small, found their way into the various theaters of operations, where their special training benefited those headquarters to which they were assigned.

In a parallel development, naval observation pilots received special instruction in spotting shore targets during early 1942, both at Quantico and at Fort Bragg. In order to train these officers in practical gunnery without having to resort to extensive travel in the Caribbean, an island was purchased off the eastern shore of Maryland in Chesapeake Bay to serve as a firing range for naval bombardment. It was the first amphibious gunnery range ever established for this specific purpose, and a new chapter in the history of naval gunfire training got under way.

As combat operations expanded and the size, mission, and capabilities of the Marine Corps increased, the administrative contacts between the various components of the Corps became more complex. The directive establishing the Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, had defined the role of the commander of that organization as that of a type commander for all units comprising FMFPac. As such General Smith came under the di-

rect command of the Commander in Chief, U. S. Pacific Fleet.⁶ At the same time, however, the Commander, FMFPac also was a direct administrative subordinate of the Commandant of the Marine Corps. In line with this organizational structure, overall tactical control of the Fleet Marine Force was vested in the Commander in Chief, U. S. Pacific Fleet, while CMC handled routine administrative matters. Since no distinct line existed between matters of tactical and administrative concern, there evolved a no-man's-land in which the Commander in Chief, U. S. Pacific Fleet, exercised a certain influence. Any change in the organization of the Fleet Marine Force, for example, could have a direct and profound effect on the tactical employment of Marine units despite the administrative nature of such changes.

During the Central Pacific Campaign successive islands were seized, which made it incumbent upon General Smith's headquarters to establish and maintain contact with the commanders of the more recently seized islands, notably those on Tinian, Guam, and Peleliu. In their capacity as island commanders these Marines were indirectly subordinate to the Commander in Chief, Pacific Ocean Areas, the channel of command leading to them from the latter by way of the area commander.

There was no chain of command between Headquarters, FMFPac and the Commander, Marianas Area, or the Commander, Marshall-Gilberts Area. Each of the latter was directly under the Commander in Chief, Pacific Ocean

⁶ Pac Flt ltr 53L-44 dtd 11Oct44.



MARINE INFANTRY AND ARTILLERY *landing exercise, New River, N.C. 1942.*
(USMC 5125)



LIEUTENANT GENERAL ROY S. GEIGER *takes command of the Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, from Lieutenant General Holland M. Smith at Oahu, Hawaii, 7 March 1945.*
(USMC 127386)

Areas. The area commanders exercised operational control over certain units of the Fleet Marine Force, either through the island or the atoll commanders. In relation to the business of these commands, the normal flow of communications passed through the Commander in Chief, Pacific Ocean Areas, though shortcuts were frequently taken to simplify procedures and conserve time.

The Commander, Amphibious Forces, U. S. Pacific Fleet and the Commander, Air Force, U. S. Pacific Fleet were type commanders under the direct control of the Commander in Chief, U. S. Pacific Fleet. Their status thus paralleled that of the Commanding General, FMFPac. In the case of these commands, the Commander in Chief, Pacific Ocean Areas acted as the hub of the wheel, though liaison officers were often directly employed between the commands.

Even though no administrative command relationship existed between units of the U. S. Army and the Fleet Marine Force in the Pacific Ocean Areas, it was inevitable that interservice cooperation and coordination would be required on an ever increasing scale as joint operations became more commonplace. During the early phase of the war in 1942, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had already authorized the creation of the amphibious corps, under a Marine officer whose staff included such Army and Navy personnel as were required. Of necessity, such officers provided the necessary liaison with their respective Services. In line with this concept, most of the U. S. Army personnel attached to Headquarters, VAC, were transferred to Head-

quarters, FMFPac when that organization was activated.⁷ There, they remained in their respective capacities and continued to serve on the general and special staffs until the cessation of hostilities.

By early 1945, it had become common practice to exchange staff representatives monthly between Headquarters, Marine Corps and FMFPac. Such an exchange provided a better liaison between the two headquarters in addition to routine communication that already existed. At the same time, a liaison officer of the Fleet Marine Force attached to the staff of Admiral Nimitz looked after the interests of his organization. The principal contacts between Headquarters, FMFPac, and Headquarters, Department of the Pacific pertained to the exchange of administrative information on personnel matters and business mutual to Marine garrison units of the Navy's shore establishment and the Fleet Marine Force. A similar exchange of information took place with the Commanding General, Marine Garrison Forces, Fourteenth Naval District, since no chain of command existed between that command and Headquarters, FMFPac.

During the early part of 1945, the trend towards representation of the Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, on Army staffs continued in the Pacific Theater. Towards this end, based on purely tactical considerations, the Marine Detachment, Tenth Army was activated on the first day of the year and assigned to Headquarters, U. S. Tenth Army, where it carried out a vital liaison func-

⁷ FMFPac SO No. 3-44, dtd 26Aug44.

tion during the planning and execution of the Okinawa campaign. The Marine Detachment, U. S. Sixth Army, was slated for a similar role during the impending assault on Kyushu in the Home Islands, in which VAC was to participate.

Pursuant to an agreement reached between the Commander in Chief, Army Forces, Pacific, and the Commander in Chief, Pacific Ocean Areas on 16 May 1945, provision was made for Headquarters, FMFPac to be represented on the staff of the Commanding General, United States Army Forces, Western Pacific. The liaison officers thus assigned were to provide the Army headquarters with information on the capabilities of FMFPac, obtain logistic support for Fleet Marine Force units under U. S. Army operational control, and make certain that directives of Army commanders corresponded to the capabilities of FMFPac. It was intended that representatives of the Fleet Marine Force would become an integral part of the Army staffs to which they were assigned; their primary duty would be to assist in planning for future operations. In their capacity as representatives of FMFPac, they could contact that headquarters directly in all matters pertaining to Fleet Marine Force policy. Activation of the Marine Detachment (Provisional), U. S. Army Forces, Western Pacific, took place on 19 June 1945. This detachment remained attached to the Army headquarters until the end of the war.

The expansion of Marine Corps staffs and headquarters in the course of World War II can be understood only when viewed in an overall relationship

with the expanded responsibilities and size of the Corps. From a total strength of 54,359 officers and men in the summer of 1941, the Marine Corps expanded eight-fold within the span of four years; on 30 June 1945, within six weeks of the war's end, the Corps numbered 37,067 officers and 437,613 men, a total of 474,680.⁸

By the time the war entered its final phase, the Marine Corps in the Continental United States had become a huge replacement training organization. The last Fleet Marine Force unit to be organized was the 29th Marines. When that unit left Camp Lejeune in 1944, training shifted for the most part to individual replacements who, upon completion of boot camp, either went on to technical schools or moved in a steady flow towards the combat areas of the Pacific Theater, according to the dictum that "there are only two kinds of Marines: those who have been overseas and those who are going."⁹ Thus, in a few short years, the Fleet Marine Force truly had come a long way, eventually comprising some 185,000 trained men in ground organizations, organized into six divisions and other supporting units.¹⁰

Beyond training members of the U. S. Marine Corps, an additional temporary function emerged for the Fleet Marine Force in 1943, when Dutch Marines were trained at Quantico and Camp Lejeune in line with the reorganization of the Royal Netherlands Marine Corps,

⁸ *U. S. Historical Statistics*, p. 736.

⁹ Statement attributed to General Vandegrift in Heinl, *Soldiers of the Sea*, p. 508.

¹⁰ Furer, *Administration of the Navy Department in World War II*, p. 595.

which was then being reconstituted in exile. Before the end of World War II, several thousands of these Netherlands Marines were to absorb some of the doctrine and experiences of their American counterparts.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF AIRCRAFT, FMFPAC¹¹

The development of the aviation arm of FMFPac during World War II paralleled that of the ground units. It portrayed the gradual ascendancy of an instrument of war which, long neglected in peacetime appropriations like most of the military establishment, was to be forged into a potent striking force. The history of Marine aviation passed through several stages of growth. Following the establishment of the Fleet Marine Force in the 1930s, the fledgling force grasped for a clearcut mission. The years prior to World War II saw the training of pilots and ground crews and the acquisition of newer type aircraft. After the Pearl Harbor attack, Marine aviation initially maintained a defensive posture during the early months of the war in the face of overwhelming enemy superiority. Eventually, there followed the establishment and consolidation of bases along the outer perimeter of the Japanese ad-

vance; and finally, a gradual movement got under way to the northwest, across the Pacific, towards the Japanese Home Islands, slow at first, but steadily accelerating as the offensive across the Pacific gained momentum.

The mission of Marine aviation, as set forth by the Navy General Board in 1939, was primarily to support the Fleet Marine Force in landing operations and in the field. As a secondary mission, Marine air was to furnish replacement squadrons for carrier-based naval aircraft. To carry out their mission, Marine pilots had to utilize airfields within a relatively short range of the objective; the only alternative to nearby airfields was to station Marine squadrons on carriers. During the early 1930s, Marine aviators gained considerable experience in that type of operation when stationed on board the *Saratoga* and *Lexington*. A lack of carriers, on the other hand, precluded such combat employment of Marine squadrons until the final phase of World War II.

Attempts to obtain carriers for the exclusive use of Marine aviation invariably resulted in a rebuff similar to that administered by the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral H. R. Stark, who on 15 March 1941 made this comment:

In fleet landing exercises recently completed, naval squadrons were landed from and marine squadrons embarked in both carriers available, and so doing is considered to be in accordance with correct principles. Assignment of a few particular carriers to the Fleet Marine Force would inevitably fail to meet possible requirements in carrier operation of marine squadrons. At the same time it would permanently reduce the number available for purely naval operations. Thus there would be imposed definite disadvantages

¹¹ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: Division of Aviation, Marine Corps Aviation Status Sheet (Pers& Loc, May42-Dec46); Aircraft, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific Administrative History, 7Aug42-16Sep44, hereafter *AirFMFPac Administrative History*; Marine Aircraft Wings, Pacific, War Diary, Aug1942-Sep1944, hereafter MAWPac WarD; Aircraft, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, War Diary, Sep1945-Dec1946, hereafter AirFMFPac WarD; Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*.

without adequate compensating advantages.

The assignment of a carrier to operate marine squadrons only could not be permitted to involve any replacement of the ship's own personnel by marines. It could not, without definite reduction of efficiency and definite violation of principles of unquestionable standing, be permitted to involve command of important units, such as carriers and their necessary supporting ships, by marine officers.¹²

The U. S. Navy's attitude with respect to the exclusive assignment of carriers to Marine aviation is understandable enough when it is recalled that during the 1930s the *Saratoga* and the *Lexington* were the only carriers the Navy had. As more of these types of ships became available, they had to be assigned to other uses. As a result, for most of World War II, Marine air support of amphibious operations was limited to landings carried out within range of land-based airfields.

Organizationally, Marine Corps aviation had humble beginnings. There were 129 Marine pilots in 1931, a figure that had increased by 9 four years later. By mid-1940, there were 245 Marine pilots; expansion of the Corps then under way resulted in an increase to 425 by the end of that year.¹³ In 1935, Marine aviation was transferred from the Division of Operations and Training at Headquarters, Marine Corps and established as an independent section under the Commandant. Less than a year later, on 1 April 1936, the Officer in Charge,

Colonel Ross E. Rowell, was appointed Director of Marine Corps Aviation. In this capacity, he continued the functions his predecessors had carried out since the days of Major Alfred A. Cunningham in 1919, by advising the Commandant on all matters pertaining to Marine aviation and acting as liaison between the Marine Corps and the Navy Bureau of Aeronautics.

When Congress established a 10,000-plane program for the U. S. Navy in June 1940, Marine Corps aviation was allotted slightly more than 10 percent of this number, a total of 1,167 planes. In line with this expansion, the 1st and 2d Marine Aircraft Wings were activated at Quantico, Virginia and San Diego, California, respectively. On paper, a wing was authorized 4 air groups with 16 squadrons, though at the time there were not even enough aircraft on hand to equip a single group. When the Japanese struck at Pearl Harbor, the total Marine aviation organization consisted of 13 squadrons with a total of 204 aircraft of all types, as follows:¹⁴

¹⁴ In this table, adapted from Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*, p. 33, V equals aircraft (heavier-than-air); M stands for Marine; F equals fighter; SB stands for scout bomber; J designates utility; R equals transport; O stands for observation. (*) On maneuvers at New Bern, N. C. Returned to Quantico 9 December. (**) No record has been found which indicates how many planes were at San Diego in wing headquarters, if any. The same is true of group headquarters at Ewa. (***) Commissioned 1 December at Naval Air Station, San Diego. No record of any planes received by 6 December. (****) Available records show only 204 planes in the Marine organization as of 6 December 1941, as compared to a figure of 251 compiled in Historical Division, HQMC in 1944.

¹² CNO ltr to Chairman, General Board, Op-12A-4-drc (SC) A21-2/CV, Ser 020512, dtd 15 Mar41, in Organization and Expansion of the U. S. Marine Corps, 1940s (OAB, NHD).

¹³ Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*, p. 30.

MARINE CORPS AVIATION, 6 DECEMBER 1941

Director: COL RALPH J. MITCHELL

1st Marine Aircraft Wing, BGen Roy S. Geiger, Quantico
Wing Hq, 1 JRB-2, 1 SBC-4

MAG-11, LtCol Harold D. Campbell, Group Hq, 2 SBD-1

VMF-111*	15 F4F-3A	2 SNJ-3	Maj Thomas J. Walker, Jr.
VMF-121*	20 F4F-3	2 SNJ-3	Maj Samuel S. Jack
VMO-151*	12 SBC-4		Maj Thomas C. Green
VMSB-131	18 SB2U-3	5 spares	Capt Paul Moret
VMSB-132	19 SBD		Maj Albert D. Cooley
VMJ-152	1 JO-2	3 J2F-4	Maj Thomas J. McQuade
	2 R3D	1 J2F-1	

2d Marine Aircraft Wing, BGen Ross E. Rowell, San Diego
Wing Hq**

MAG-21, LtCol Claude A. Larkin, Ewa, T.H.

VMF-211	12 F4F-3	at Wake	Maj Paul A. Putnam
	10 F4F-3	1 SNJ at Ewa	
VMF-221	12 F2A-3	in <i>Saratoga</i>	Maj Verne J. McCaul
VMO-251***			Capt Elliott E. Bard
VMSB-231	18 SB2U-3	in <i>Lexington</i>	Maj C. J. Chappell, Jr.
	7 SB2U-3	at Ewa	
VMSB-232	19 SBD-1	3 SBD-2	Maj Ira L. Kimes
VMJ-252	2 R3D-2	1 JO-2	Maj Perry K. Smith
	2 J2F-4	1 SB2U-3	
	1 JRS-1	1 SBD-1	

Virgin Islands, Base Air Detachment 3

VMS-3	7 J2F-4	1 JRF	Maj Roger T. Carleson
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Total planes, 204****

Just one week prior to the Pearl Harbor attack, the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Stark, once more commented on the size of the Marine Corps contemplated under the then existing state of limited emergency. In

outlining the overall mission of the Corps in the immediate future, the Admiral foresaw three types of operations calling for the employment of Marines. These were broken down into:

a. small expeditions for the seizure of

small islands, such as a small atoll; or a compact group of islands, well separated from other islands or land masses, such as the Azores;

b. large expeditions requiring the simultaneous or successive capture of several islands spread over a considerable area, with a view to developing a secure advanced base area for future operations of the fleet, and

c. large expeditions to overseas continental areas for the seizure of bases to be used subsequently as bridgeheads for extensive land campaigns.¹⁵

In cautioning against too large an expansion of the Marine Corps, Admiral Stark stated:

It seems apparent that were the Navy to insist on building up amphibious assault troops in numbers sufficient for all three of the categories of operations mentioned in paragraph 3, the effect would be that the Navy would be attempting to create a separate army of its own, entirely independent of the United States Army, and of a size greater than has heretofore been contemplated. Unfavorable reactions would ensue, which might even result in the absorption by the Army of all Marine Corps units at shore stations. Were this to occur, the Navy would be deprived of troops especially trained to work with the fleet, and to take the lead in amphibious operations. Assembling all the equipment for a third Marine division would be of little use, because it takes a long time to enlist and train the personnel of a division, and during the training period the two existing divisions would be more or less broken up to provide for the new division a nucleus of trained men. The net result would be that, for a considerable period, the Navy

would be without the services of even one trained division.¹⁶

At the same time the Chief of Naval Operations also outlined his objections to provisions that the General Board had made in the summer of 1941 with respect to the 15,000-plane program then recommended. This plan called for two air wings, each to be attached to a Marine division, and the establishment of four base defense air groups for the defense of advance bases in co-operation with Marine defense battalions. According to the program that the General Board had approved, medium bombers were to be eliminated from the aircraft wing and dive bombers substituted in their place. In view of the mission of the Marine Corps which was to capture positions and defend them once they had been seized, Admiral Stark felt that medium range bombers would be far more valuable than dive bombers. In outlining his objections to the proposed course of action, the Chief of Naval Operations added:

Once the wing is established ashore after capture of the position, medium range bombers are needed for reaching into back areas for attack on enemy reinforcements which may be coming up, or, if established on an island, to reach out at considerable distances to attack enemy bases or naval vessels. Providing only dive bombers for Marine aircraft organizations is considered unsound, since dive bombers are not effective against well armed ships or shore bases except at considerable sacrifice. War experience has demonstrated the need not only for dive bombers, but also for long range bombers and torpedo planes.¹⁷

¹⁵ CNO ltr to SecNac, dtd 1Dec41 Op.12-VDS (SC) P-16-1KK Serial 0120712, in Organization and Expansion of the U. S. Marine Corps, 1940s (OAB, NHD).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

This high-altitude bomber versus dive bomber controversy remained unsolved, for the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, immense enemy victories during the initial phase of the war in the Pacific, and requirements in men and material that now became global in nature put an end to the gradual increase of Marine Corps strength. In the words of one historical account:

The amphibious character of the war in the Pacific imposed on the Marine Corps greater tasks than any it had ever been called on to perform. Expanding the Corps and equipping it with the weapons and support facilities demanded by modern amphibious undertakings was an administrative achievement of the first magnitude but was overshadowed by the readiness of the Fleet Marine Force to undertake the Guadalcanal Operation at a critical time early in the war when other ground forces were still undergoing training.¹⁸

The development of the command organization of Marine aviation was to follow a course that was somewhat similar to that of the ground units. In August 1942, at a time when Marine aviation was undergoing a rapid expansion in line with the demands of the war in the Pacific, the need for a command echelon above that of the Marine air wing became apparent. In order to meet this requirement the Commandant, General Holcomb, on 10 August 1942 ordered the establishment of a new command to be known as Marine Aircraft Wings, Pacific, under Major General Ross E. Rowell, who up to this time had commanded the 2d Marine Aircraft Wing.

The new command was to consist of the Headquarters, a Service Group, the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, the 2d Marine Aircraft Wing, and the 4th Marine Base Defense Aircraft Wing.¹⁹ While Headquarters was to be located at Pearl Harbor, the Service Group was to be situated at a place where it could best carry out its function of dealing with personnel and supplies. The 1st and 2d Marine Aircraft Wings were to retain all units assigned to them at this time, except for squadrons and groups stationed at outlying bases for defense purposes. These latter units were to be incorporated into the 4th Marine Base Defense Aircraft Wing.

Operating under Admiral Nimitz, the new headquarters was responsible for the organization, administration, and distribution of personnel and supplies within the command. Its area of responsibility extended to all Marine aviation units in the Pacific except for those assigned to a specific task organization. General Rowell was to make recommendations to Admiral Nimitz as to the employment of Marine aviation units in the Pacific Theater.

Headquarters Squadron, Marine Aircraft Wings, Pacific, was activated at the Naval Air Station, San Diego on 15 August 1942. Initially, the organization consisted of 10 officers and 24 enlisted men.²⁰ Five days later, the Service Group was activated, in accordance with the original authority which had stated that the group was to be established "for the distribution of personnel and material with operating

¹⁸ Furer, *Administration of the Navy Department in World War II*, p. 595.

¹⁹ CMC ltr to MajGen Ross E. Rowell, dtd 10Aug52, App 1 to MAWPac WarD, p. 1.

²⁰ MAWPac Hist, p. 2.

agencies at such localities as may be appropriate.”²¹ The first officer to command the Service Group was Colonel Lewie G. Merritt.

One of the first measures initiated by General Rowell was to field the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, commanded by Brigadier General Roy Geiger. Orders to this effect were issued on 21 August, directing Headquarters and Service Squadron, 1st MAW and MAG-12 to head for the South Pacific. There, the battle for Guadalcanal was just getting under way, and General Geiger’s pilots would soon make a name for themselves in the defense of Henderson Field. By 24 August, the 4th Marine Base Defense Aircraft Wing was organized under Colonel Claude A. Larkin. Initially, this wing was to consist of units of the 1st and 2d Marine Aircraft Wings which were assigned to the defense of outlying bases.

Once the 4th Wing had been organized, the time had come for Marine Aircraft Wings, Pacific, to leave the Continental United States. Accordingly, Admiral Nimitz on 5 September requested General Rowell to move his headquarters to Hawaii, where it was to be based at Ewa, which had been commissioned as a Marine Air Station only five days earlier. The move to Hawaii was designed to bring about closer liaison between Marine Aircraft Wings, Pacific, its subordinate units in the Pacific Theater, and the headquarters of Admiral Nimitz. Pursuant to these orders²² General Rowell left San

Diego for Hawaii on 16 September, followed less than two weeks later by Headquarters Squadron, Marine Air Wings, Pacific, which made the voyage by ship and reached Pearl Harbor on 4 October. On 19 November, MAG-23 returned from Guadalcanal en route to the Continental United States, where personnel of this group were broken up and split into cadres that were to become Marine Aircraft Groups 41, 42, 43, and 44. Some of these cadres became the nuclei for new Marine air stations to be established at El Centro, Santa Barbara, and Mojave.²³

Meanwhile, the expanding needs of Marine aviation in the Pacific Theater placed a heavy workload on the Service Group, both with respect to personnel replacement and the procurement of materiel. In order to furnish additional support for the Service Group, which had remained in the Continental United States, General Rowell on 3 December 1942 ordered it to be expanded into a larger unit designated as Marine Fleet Air, West Coast. This organization was activated on 22 January 1943 under the command of Colonel Merritt, who had previously been in charge of the now defunct Service Group.

One of the immediate problems facing General Rowell’s recently constituted headquarters was that of channeling replacements into the combat area. The 1st Wing estimated at the time that 5 percent enlisted ground personnel, 25 percent pilots, and 20 percent radioman-gunner replacements would be required for each month of combat in the South Pacific.²⁴ In re-

²¹ CMC ltr to MajGen Rowell, dtd 10Aug42, *Ibid.*

²² CinCPac Dispatch #050113, as cited in *MAWPac Hist*, p. 1.

²³ *MAWPac Hist*, p. 4.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

sponse to this problem, the 2d Marine Aircraft Wing, commanded by Colonel Francis P. Mulcahy, was ordered into the South Pacific area to relieve General Geiger's wing in late February 1943.

Major General Ralph J. Mitchell, who had served as Director of Aviation until late March 1943 assumed command of Marine Aircraft, South Pacific on 21 April, thus heading the principal subordinate echelon of Marine Aircraft Wings, Pacific. Both the 1st and the 2d Marine Aircraft Wings came under his headquarters. In a reflection of the stepped up operations in the South Pacific during the summer of 1943, several changes were made in the organization of Marine aviation. In August, Admiral Nimitz ordered Headquarters of the 4th Marine Base Defense Aircraft Wing to be established in Samoa, where it was to function under the operational control of the Commanding General, Samoan Force. On the 21st of the month, Brigadier General Harold D. Campbell assumed command of the Aircraft Defense Force, Samoan Area. Embarkation of the first echelon of the 4th Wing for Samoa got under way on 28 August.

The continued expansion of Marine aviation in the field necessitated additional changes in the areas farther to the rear. Accordingly, on 1 September 1943, Marine Aircraft, Hawaiian Area was activated. In another development highlighting the increasingly important part played by Marine aviation in the South Pacific, General Mitchell, in November 1943, became Commander of Aircraft in the Solomons Area (ComAir

Sols) in addition to his other duties, relieving Army Air Forces Major General Nathan Twining.

As of the beginning of 1944, Marine Air Wings, Pacific, still commanded by General Rowell, functioned under Air Force, Pacific Fleet, alternately designated as Task Force 59.11. The units subordinated to General Rowell's headquarters at this time were Marine Aircraft, South Pacific; the 4th Marine Base Defense Aircraft Wing; Marine Aircraft, Hawaiian Area, and Marine Fleet Air, West Coast. By this time the staff at Headquarters, Marine Air Wings, Pacific, numbered 27 officers and 118 enlisted men.²⁵

On 8 May 1944 the 3d Marine Aircraft Wing, which had previously been a training command on the East Coast, and was on this date commanded by Brigadier General Walter G. Farrell, who had just taken over from Brigadier General Larkin, reached Ewa. There, it assumed the functions which had previously been assigned to Marine Aircraft, Hawaiian Area. The latter headquarters was deactivated.²⁶ All elements of the former command were incorporated into the new wing.

The establishment of Headquarters, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, in the summer of 1944 brought with it the question as to who was to control the Fleet Marine Force aviation units. In August of that year, the Commandant had directed

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

²⁶ *MAWPac Chronology* in MAWPac WarD, p. 4.

that Marine aviation in the Pacific was to be under the newly organized Fleet Marine Force, Pacific. This order had been revoked at the direction of Admiral Nimitz, and for a month the status of these aviation units remained unclarified. This uncertainty ended on 11 October 1944, when Marine Aircraft Wings, Pacific was redesignated as Aircraft, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific.²⁷ The implementation order issued by General Mulcahy, who had assumed command of Marine Aircraft Wings, Pacific on 16 September, spelled out in detail:

Aircraft Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, is a major unit of the Fleet Marine Force, Pacific. The Commanding General, Aircraft, Fleet Marine Force performs type command functions under the Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force with respect to matters for which the latter is responsible. He also performs type command functions under Commander Air Force, Pacific Fleet, with respect to aviation matters. The operational control of the tactical units of Aircraft, Fleet Marine Force, rests with Commander Air Force, Pacific Fleet, unless they are otherwise assigned.²⁸

Two additional subordinate commands were established on 21 October 1944. One was the Provisional Air Support Command at Ewa under Colonel Vernon E. Megee. The overall purpose of this command was to act as a liaison group in amphibious operations be-

tween ground forces and supporting aircraft. The other was Marine Carrier Groups, Aircraft, FMFPac, which was organized at Santa Barbara, California, under the command of Colonel Albert D. Cooley. Creation of the latter organization marked the end of years of Marine efforts to have men and aircraft assigned to carriers. Colonel Cooley's command consisted of MBDA-48 at Santa Barbara and MAG-51 at Mojave, shortly thereafter redesignated as Marine Air Support Groups. Each Air Support Group was to consist of four carrier air groups, each with an 18-plane fighter squadron and a 12-plane torpedo-bomber squadron.

At the beginning of 1945, the units subordinate to Aircraft, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, were the 1st, 2d, 3d, and 4th Marine Air Wings; Marine Fleet Air, West Coast, and the newly established Provisional Air Support Command. This organization remained in effect during the early months of 1945, though changes in command were frequent. Thus, on 23 February, Major General James T. Moore, who had led the 2d Marine Aircraft Wing during the campaign in the Palaus, traded commands with Major General Mulcahy. General Moore became Commanding General, Aircraft, FMFPac, while General Mulcahy assumed command of the 2d Wing, which subsequently was to take part in the invasion of Okinawa.

One final change was to mark the Marine aviation organization in the Pacific Theater prior to the end of the war. On 21 April 1945, the Provisional Air Support Command was disbanded and

²⁷ Pacific Flt Ltr 53L-44, dtd 11Oct44, in Organization and Expansion of the U. S. Marine Corps, 1940s (OAB, NHD).

²⁸ FMFPac GO No. 3-44, dtd 24Oct 44, App 2 to MAWPac WarD.

the personnel and equipment of that unit were taken over by the newly established Marine Air Support Control Units, Amphibious Forces, Pacific. This command, under Colonel Megee, consisted of a headquarters and four teams designed to furnish close air support control for ground forces in amphibious operations. The command, functioning under the Commander, Amphibious Forces, Pacific, continued to carry out its administrative function at Ewa until the end of the war.

The evolution of Marine Corps aviation administrative headquarters must be viewed from the organizational requirements levied on that arm. Thus, by the end of World War II, Marine aviation had expanded to a total of 103 tactical squadrons, numbering 10,049 pilots and a total of 116,628 personnel.²⁹ Not included in these figures are those nontactical squadrons used for transport and observation. In a span of four years, Marine aviation had mushroomed from 2 aircraft groups with 9 aircraft squadrons to 5 aircraft wings, 32

aircraft groups, and 131 aircraft squadrons.³⁰

In retrospect, the organization of Marine Aviation met the demands made upon it, oftentimes by trial and error, within the limitations imposed by time and recurrent shortages in manpower and materiel. The flexibility of the administrative support available to the tactical squadrons in the field contributed much in helping these units to carry out their tactical missions. Thus, when compared to the development of the Fleet Marine Force organization as outlined in the previous chapter, it becomes readily apparent that the growth of Marine aviation was directly proportionate to overall Marine strength. The effect of this administrative expansion on the units in the field will be demonstrated in subsequent parts of this volume which describe in detail the performance of Marine aviators and their equipment in a tactical environment.

²⁹ Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*, p. 422.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 434. An additional monthly breakdown of Marine aviation units, location, and personnel is contained in Division of Aviation Monthly Status Sheets, Mar43-Dec46, Division of Aviation, HQMC.

PART III

The Palaus: Gateway To The Philippines

Strategic Situation ¹

Most American planners agreed by early 1944 that the next important goal in the increasingly successful war against Japan was to secure a base in the strategic triangle formed by the Philippines, Formosa, and the coast of

China. Such a move would sever the lines of communication between Japan's home islands and her rich conquered lands in the Netherlands Indies and Southeast Asia. Moreover, the plan envisaged sites for long range bomber airfields, as well as a valuable base from which future invasions, including the ultimate assault of Japan itself, could be mounted. After much debate over the proper avenues of advance, the Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed to a compromise which would set in motion a two-pronged attack along the two most practicable routes of approach: one through the Central Pacific, and the other along the New Guinea-Mindanao axis originating from the Southwest Pacific.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: Maj Frank O. Hough, *The Assault on Peleliu* (Washington: HistDiv, HQMC, 1950), hereafter Hough, *Assault on Peleliu*; Isely and Crowl, *U. S. Marines and Amphibious War*; *The War Reports of General of the Army George C. Marshall—General of the Army H. H. Arnold—Fleet Admiral Ernest J. King* (Philadelphia and New York: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1947), hereafter *War Reports* with appropriate originator; Robert Ross Smith, *The Approach to the Philippines—The War in the Pacific—U. S. Army in World War II* (Washington: OCMH, DA, 1953), hereafter Smith, *Approach to the Philippines*; USSBS(Pac), NavAnalysis Div, *The Campaigns of the Pacific War* (Washington, 1946), hereafter USSBS(Pac), *Pacific Campaigns*; Samuel Eliot Morison, *Leyte June 1944—January 1945—History of United States Naval Operations in World War II*, v. XII (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1958), hereafter Morison, *Leyte*; Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate, eds., *The Pacific: Matterhorn to Nagasaki—The Army Air Forces in World War II*, v. V (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1953), hereafter Craven and Cate, *The Pacific*. Where location citations for documentary sources for this part are missing, the material is in the following files of the Archives, Historical Division, Headquarters Marine Corps: Palau Area Operations; Peleliu Monograph and Comment File; Unit Historical Report.

Both of these offensives were well advanced by the summer months of 1944. By a series of amphibious landings, General Douglas MacArthur's Southwest Pacific Area forces had reached the western extremity of New Guinea. As a result, the island was neutralized as a base for enemy operations, and the way was cleared for a move against Mindanao (See Map 1). In the Central Pacific, meanwhile, troops controlled by Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, Commander in Chief, Pacific Ocean Areas (CinCPOA) had seized Saipan and consolidated their hold on the Marianas. When these two avenues of attack converged in a pincer movement on the Philippines, the

planned encirclement of bypassed Japanese bases would be complete, and the Central Pacific for all practical purposes would be turned into an American lake. First, however, thought had to be given to the safeguarding of MacArthur's invasion route north from New Guinea.

Some 530 miles directly east of Mindanao lay Japan's main bastion in the Western Carolines, the Palau Islands. General MacArthur believed that he could not mount an amphibious campaign against the Philippines unless this potential threat to his lines of communications was eliminated. It appeared that land-based aircraft could not neutralize this danger, for the enemy stronghold was too far distant from newly-acquired bases for sustained and effective air attacks. Permanent neutralization of the Palaus, Pacific planners decided, could be gained only by amphibious assault.

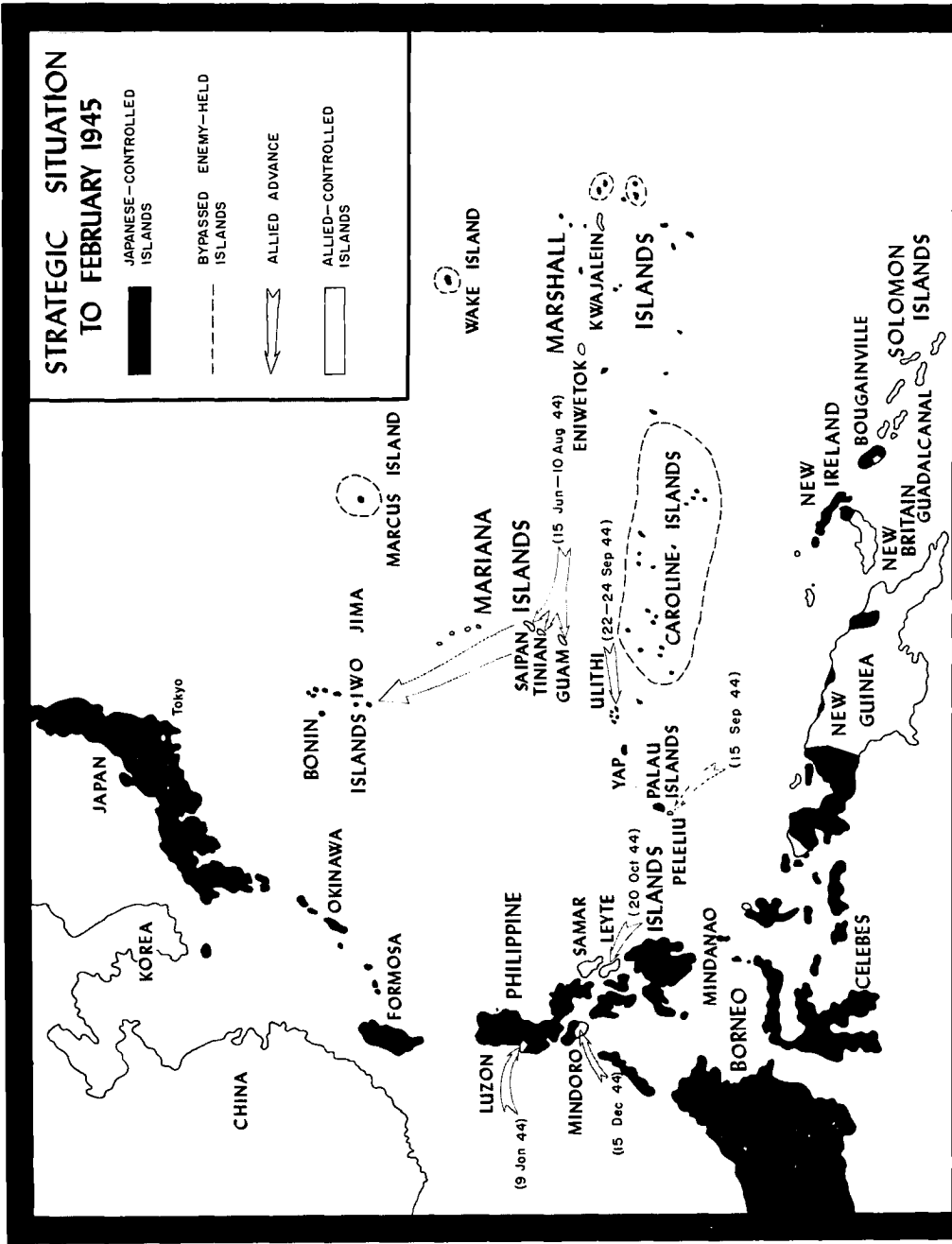
Although three excellent targets stood out in the Western Carolines—the Palaus' airfields and anchorages, Yap's air base, and Ulithi's exceptionally spacious and deep anchorage—the high level planners envisioned, at first, only the seizure of the Palaus. This undertaking was given the rather prophetic code name of Operation STALEMATE, for revisions, postponements, and drastic changes characterized it right up to the moment of actual consummation. Before the campaign initiated by STALEMATE was ended, all three of the targets were to be included in its operation plans, although only the islands of Peleliu and Angaur in the southern Palaus and the Ulithi Atoll actually would be invaded.

As Admiral Nimitz later explained, the reasons for STALEMATE were twofold: "first, to remove from MacArthur's right flank, in his progress to the Southern Philippines, a definite threat of attack; second, to secure for our forces a base from which to support MacArthur's operations into the Southern Philippines."² On the same day proposed for the landing on Peleliu, infantry units of the Southwest Pacific command would assault the island of Morotai in the Moluccas, thus securing MacArthur's left flank and providing him with a suitable airfield site for land-based aircraft to support his invasion armada mounting from New Guinea.

Whether or not the Palau Operation was a necessary prerequisite for MacArthur's return to the Philippines remains a matter of unproductive speculation. Except for those who participated in it, Peleliu largely remains a forgotten battle, its location unknown, its name calling forth no patriotic remembrance of self-sacrifice or gallant deeds as do the battles of Guadalcanal, Tarawa, and Iwo Jima. For the Marines who stormed ashore on Peleliu, however, the strategic value of the island may not have been clear, but duty was. They had been given a job to do, and they went ahead and did it. As Major Frank O. Hough, a veteran of the fighting on "Bloody" Peleliu, commented:

Whatever might have been, the Marines hit the Peleliu beaches on 15 September 1944, and history records that nine days after the assault phase was declared at an

² FAdm Chester W. Nimitz ltr to Philip A. Crowl, dtd 5Oct49, cited in Isely and Crowl, *U. S. Marines and Amphibious War*, p. 392.



Map 1

end, MacArthur invaded Leyte. For better or for worse, his flank had been secured, and with the action which followed the Pacific War entered a new and decisive phase.³

GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND⁴

As the westernmost extremity of the vast Carolines Islands chain, which spans some 33 degrees of longitude across the Pacific Ocean just north of the equator, the Palaus lie roughly 500 miles from both the Philippines to the west and New Guinea to the south, and 240 miles from Yap to the east. This remoteness, especially from the rest of Micronesia, long retarded the islands' development and delayed knowledge of their existence to the outside world.

Although Ruy Lopez de Villalobos is generally credited with the discovery of

the Palaus in 1543, the first recorded visit to the island was made in 1712 by Spanish missionaries. Afterwards, Spain was to maintain a shadowy claim of ownership over the Palaus and the rest of the Western Carolines; yet she made no real attempts at the economic development or social improvement of them. Except for visits by English ships in 1738 and 1791, the Palaus remained unknown to the Western World until the middle of the 18th Century when trading ships plying the Chinese market rediscovered them.

By 1885, Spain's long failure to develop the Western Carolines encouraged Imperial Germany, anxious at this time for overseas colonies to supplement her rapidly growing industrial factories, to land naval forces at Yap and take possession. This challenge to Spanish sovereignty proved fruitless, for a neutral arbitrator soon disallowed the Germans' claim to the disputed islands. In 1899, however, Spain suddenly decided to withdraw completely from the Pacific area; she wanted no more territorial losses such as she had suffered in the Spanish-American War. As a result, she sold the Carolines, Marshalls, and Marianas to the Germans, who immediately began to exploit the islands with vigor. By 1914, this exploitation had provided the Palaus with a telegraph station and modernized transportation facilities. In addition, the mining of phosphates and the production of copra had been initiated.

At this point, the outbreak of World War I gave Japan a golden opportunity for expanding into the Central Pacific. Quickly joining the Allies, she organized naval expeditions and set about

³ Hough, *Assault on Peleliu*, p. 1.

⁴ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: Joint Intelligence Study Publishing Board, Joint Army-Navy Intelligence Study of Palau Islands (JANIS No. 103), 2 vols, dtd Apr44, hereafter *JANIS No. 103*; CinCPac-CinCPOA Bulletin No. 124-44, Southern Palau, dtd 15Aug44; JICPOA, Information Bulletin: Palau, dtd 15Feb44, hereafter *JICPOA Bulletin No. 17-44*; JICPOA, Information Bulletin: Palau Islands, dtd 1Jun44, hereafter *JICPOA Bulletin No. 87-44*; Hough, *Assault on Peleliu*; Herbert W. Krieger, *Island Peoples of the Western Pacific Micronesia and Melanesia: Smithsonian Institution War Background Studies Number 16* (Washington: The Smithsonian Institution, 1943); R. W. Robson, *The Pacific Islands Handbook 1944: North American Edition* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1945); LCdr Dorothy E. Richard, *United States Naval Administration of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands*, 3 vols (Washington: CNO, 1957).

seizing Germany's Pacific possessions. This energetic land-grab was more or less legitimized after the war, when the new League of Nations granted Japan a mandate over the former German colonies north of the equator. After their abrupt withdrawal from the League in 1935, the Japanese continued exercising a *de facto* sovereignty over the Palau Islands, as well as the rest of the mandated islands.

Geographically, the Palaus consist of several large islands and well over a hundred smaller ones, extending generally in a northeast-southwest direction for nearly 100 miles (See Map 2). Except for Angaur in the south and two small atolls in the north, the whole group lies within a great encircling coral reef which is largely a barrier reef on the west and a fringing reef on the east. The maximum width between the outer reefs is about 20 miles, and the whole island group covers approximately 175 square miles. All of the islands are irregularly shaped and most are hilly, but they vary greatly in physical character, ranging from flat atolls in the north to volcanic central islands and, finally, to coral-limestone islands in the south.

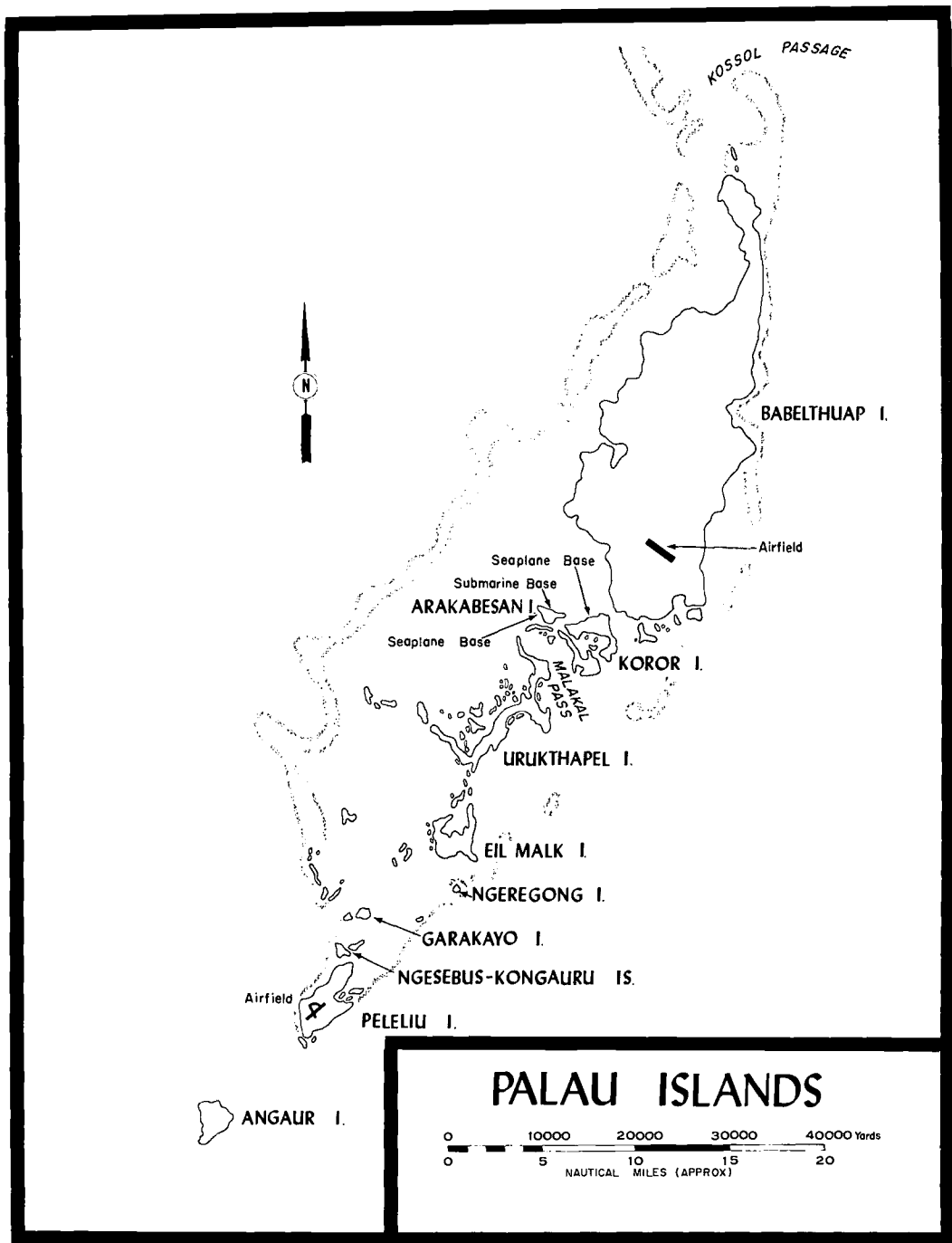
Lying only a few degrees above the equator, the Palaus have a humid and hot climate typically equatorial, and the seasons are monotonously uniform and unchanging. In any month, the rainfall is rarely less than 4 inches, and the mean monthly temperature is seldom less than 80 or more than 82 degrees Fahrenheit. While temperatures are not excessively hot, the relative humidity (82%) remains high at all times and is most discomforting and debili-

tating. Also typical of equatorial conditions are the threats to health caused by dengue and dysentery; strangely enough, however, malarial mosquitoes are not present in the Palaus.

During the fall season (September-November), westerly winds predominate, and there are usually three heavy thunderstorms a month, while typhoons are an ever-present threat. In addition, these fall months normally have 18 to 20 rainy days, the average rainfall for any one month being just over 10 inches. Visibility is usually good, however, with mean monthly amounts of cloud cover varying from four-tenths to six-tenths. Fogs are rare and mists infrequent.

The natives inhabiting these equatorial islands are basically Micronesians, a racial blend of the lighter Polynesian and the darker Melanesian stocks. Physically, however, Palauans most nearly resemble the Malay people of the Netherlands Indies, probably because of interracial mixing that occurred as the result of an eastward seaborne immigration of the Malays. The Palau language shows obvious Malayan influences also. In fact, Americans found great language and cultural differences between the people of the Western Carolines and those whom they encountered in Micronesia.

Like other native ethnic groups in the Pacific islands, the Palauans suffered a population decline following the coming of the white man, usually as a result of his diseases. From an estimated 40,000 in 1800, the number of Palauans had shrunk to a pre-World War II total of 6,500. An estimated 20,000 Japanese civilians, who had emigrated from the



Map 2

E. L. Wilson

Home Islands prior to the war, lived in the Palaus. As a result, a certain intermingling of Japanese and Palauan blood lines occurred.

While the natives enjoyed an adequate food supply due to the islands' staple taro crop, large quantities of rice had to be imported from the Home Islands each year to feed the numerous Japanese living there. Fish from the surrounding waters, of course, provided an important dietary supplement. The only agricultural export produced by the natives was copra, but the extensive phosphate deposits on Angaur and Peleliu supplied the Palaus' most valuable export. Trade between the various islands and the outside world was restricted by the Japanese almost solely to the Home Islands.

The principal islands in the Palau chain from north to south are Babelthuap, Koror, Arakabesan, Malakal, Urukthapel, Eil Malk, Peleliu, and Angaur. Larger than all others combined, Babelthuap has a rugged interior with heights up to 800 feet, and is covered with a typical rainforest growth. Just north of the large island lies Kossol Passage, a valuable naval anchorage because of its spacious reef-enclosed area with a coral and sand bottom. Centrally located and near the best anchorages and harbors, the town of Koror on the island of the same name is just to the south of Babelthuap. Under Japanese rule, it functioned as the commercial, administrative, and communication hub for the island group, as well as governmental headquarters for the entire mandated territory. It was, however, the southernmost islands, Peleliu and Angaur, upon which the

attention of the American planners came to focus.

Located just inside the southwest tip of the huge Palau reef, Peleliu is an oddly shaped island with two elongated arms of land. Often described as resembling the claw of a lobster, this coral-limestone island is approximately six miles long, is aligned in a north-south direction, and has a maximum width of slightly more than two miles. The relatively flat and wide southern section contrasts sharply with the northern elongated arm which is dominated by an irregular series of broken coral ridges, narrow valleys, and rugged peaks. The key terrain from a military viewpoint, this ridge system derived its name from the 550-foot Umurbrogol Mountain. Literally honeycombed with natural caves, a nightmare of crags, pinnacles, and coral rubble, this type of terrain lends itself well to defensive tactics (See Map 3).

To the east, Peleliu's other peninsula soon tapers off into a series of smaller islets, separated from each other and the longer northern arm by a complex of swamps and shoal coral. This eastern arm of land extending out from the southern portion of Peleliu is virtually separated from it by a tidal coral flat choked with mangroves. The southernmost part of the island, on the other hand, terminates into two promontories with a cove between. The southwestern promontory, sometimes called Ngar-moked Island, is larger and more rugged than the southeastern one, which is connected to the mainland only by a narrow spit of sand.

The island is heavily wooded with a thick scrub jungle growth, and on the

thin topsoil of the Umurbrogol ridges grew a sparse, scraggly vegetation that cloaked the contours beneath and defied all attempts of pre-invasion aerial reconnaissance. A dense tropical growth thrives along most of the island's shores, with mangrove swamps bordering the northeastern beaches. The island has no rivers or lakes, and except for a few swamps, its soils drain within a few hours after a heavy rainfall. For their water supply, Peleliu's inhabitants depended chiefly upon rain water stored in cisterns.

Amphibious planners found no dearth of suitable beaches on Peleliu, for landings were feasible at almost any point, providing the reef was passable. Along the east coast is a narrow reef which borders the shoreline, except to the south where small bays occur, and to the north where the reef lies 1,200 to 5,000 yards offshore. On the western side of Peleliu, there is a broad, shallow reef shelf, varying in width from over a mile in the north to 400 yards in the south. The outer part, somewhat higher than the inner portion, was strewn with boulders. At a few points, there are breaks in the reef, where restricted channels permit passage of small boats at high tide. The northern part of the reef is from 1,400 to 1,600 yards offshore, while in the south it averages 500 yards. During the fall months, the west shores of Peleliu receive only a light to moderate surf, and the mean range of its tides is from 3.3 to 3.9 feet.

The beaches on the western side, the best in terms of amphibious assaults, are extensive. Composed of coarse textured coral sands, they are trafficable at all times, particularly when wet.

Their surface is generally rough and rubbly, with much coral debris lying about. The slope of the beaches is usually moderate to steep, and passage inland encounters, in general, only moderately rising wooded areas.

The main military value of Peleliu, and of the Palaus, lay in its southern lowlands, where the Japanese had already built two unusually good runways in an X pattern. Surfaced with hard-packed coral, this airfield was suitable for bombers and fighters, and was served by ample taxiways, dispersal areas, and turning circles. A scrub jungle, interspersed with wild coconut trees and an occasional grassy clearing, flanked the field on both the west and south, while a dense mangrove swamp bordered it on the east. To the north was an extensive area of buildings, and right behind them began the sharp ridges of the Umurbrogol system, which were to prove such an ideal position for the defenders. Also of military interest was the auxiliary fighter strip in the process of being constructed on Ngesebus Island, which lay off the northern tip of Peleliu, connected by a wooden causeway across a shallow reef to the mainland.

The Japanese airfield, near the village of Asias, was the central focus of Peleliu's road system. From the airfield, the West and East Roads ran up the northern peninsula, flanking the Umurbrogol highlands. In the north where the ridges flatten out briefly, these two roads converged into one that continued to the northernmost tip of Peleliu and the village of Akalokul, site of a phosphate crushing plant and a hand-operated, narrow-gauge railroad.

About half way up the West Road, near the village of Garekoru, a trail angled across the ridges to link up with the East Road. From Asias, a road ran northeast across the narrow causeway and up the eastern peninsula to Ngardolok, where the Japanese had set up a radio-direction finder, a power plant, and a few other military installations. A southern extension of the East Road served the promontories to the south.

The other island attracting the attention of American planners was smaller and more compact than Peleliu. Angaur is the southernmost of the Palau Islands and lies outside of the complex of reefs surrounding them. The island is composed of raised coral and is shaped somewhat like a half-moon, with its concave side facing to the west. Approximately 5,000 yards north to south and nearly 4,000 yards at its maximum width, Angaur has an estimated area of 2,000 acres. Its highest elevation, about 200 feet, is in the more rugged northwest corner, and there are steep 20- to 40-foot cliffs along much of the shoreline. The remainder of the densely wooded island, however, is almost flat, and its capability of being readily transformed into a heavy bomber site made it a military objective worthy of seizure. Barriers to overland movement were the dense jungle growth, swampy areas inland, steep cliffs, two small lakes formed by water collecting in abandoned phosphate diggings, and the broken ridges of the northwest corner.

Several excellent beaches for landing operations occur on Angaur, with movement immediately inland hampered only by the rainforest and thick under-

growth. Where reefs fringe the coast, they are generally narrow and drop off sharply into deep water. A sheltered water area exists on the west side near the village of Saipan. The port and trade center of the island, this village was connected with the other coasts by roads, trails, and narrow-gauge railway lines.

Two other potential targets, besides the Palaus, also played an important role in the evolution of STALEMATE: Yap Island and Ulithi Atoll. Yap, actually a cluster of islands grouped together on a triangular reef, possessed a well-developed and strongly garrisoned Japanese airbase. None of Ulithi's some 30 islands, on the other hand, was considered suitable by Japanese engineers for the construction of an airstrip, and the atoll was only lightly held. Ulithi, however, possessed an excellent sheltered anchorage, and occupied a central position in respect to other Pacific islands the Americans had seized or intended to seize. After its capture, it was destined to become the vital hub of naval operations in the Western Pacific during the last days of the war.

OPERATION STALEMATE II⁵

Initial Allied planning for the capture of the Palaus started during the First

⁵ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: ComThirdFlt, Rpt on Seizure of Southern Palau Islands and Ulithi, Concurrent Ops in Support of the Seizure of Morotai, dtd 14Nov44, hereafter *ThirdFlt AR*; ComWesPacTFs OPlan No. 14-44, dtd 1Aug44; III PhibFor, Rpt on STALEMATE II Op, dtd 11Nov44, hereafter *III PhibFor STALEMATE II Rpt*; TF 31 OPlan A302-44, dtd 4Aug44;

Quebec Conference (QUADRANT) in August 1943. During this top level meeting, a tentative date of 31 December 1944 was fixed for the assault on the Palaus; the campaign would follow the seizure of the Marshalls and Truk, but precede the attack on the Marianas. Subsequent strategic revisions, however, provided for the bypassing of Truk and the capture of the Palaus in September following the occupation of Saipan, Tinian, and Guam. This new schedule was formulated by the Joint Chiefs of Staff directive of 12 March 1944.

Preliminary steps, meanwhile, had already been initiated by top Pacific commands. A Marine general, passing through Pearl Harbor on his way to the front in January 1944, found the Planning Section of CinCPOA Staff, headed by Colonel Ralph R. Robinson, USMC, far advanced in its preparation for a future assault of Babelthup. In fact, the general noted that the planners were utilizing the same landing area as used by a Marine Corps Schools problem in the thirties.⁶ A month later, Joint Intelligence Center, Pacific Ocean Areas distributed a bulletin setting forth what was then known about the Palaus. This was little enough, for such convenient intelligence sources as coast-

watchers and trading ships' captains, often available in earlier campaigns, were totally lacking. Until the Americans actually landed in the Palaus, any terrain studies of the islands would have to be made solely from aerial or submarine reconnaissance.

Operation STALEMATE was formally launched on 10 May, when Admiral Nimitz issued the Joint Staff Study for the Palau Operation. This study contained the general organization of the forces to be employed, the allocation of ground, air, and naval units, the scheme of maneuver, and the logistic support plan. The date for the landing was tentatively set for 15 September 1944. As copies came into the hands of the assault and support echelons concerned, detailed planning began immediately. The planning for the Marianas campaign was minutely scrutinized, with a view of profiting from previous errors and of eliminating all unnecessary detail from the plans of each subordinate command.

This flurry of activity among the staffs of the various Pacific commanders accelerated appreciably on 29 May, when CinCPOA promulgated a warning order envisioning the capture of the entire Palau Group with a target date of 8 September. This ambitious undertaking, larger in scale than any previous Pacific operation, would employ four assault divisions, organized into two corps.

ExTrps, ThirdFlt, SAR, Palau Op, dated 12Oct44, hereafter *ExTrps SAR*; IIIAC, Op-Rpt-PalausOps, dtd 24Oct44, hereafter *IIIAC Palaus Rpt*; *Peleliu Comment File*; Hough, *Assault on Peleliu*; Smith, *Approach to the Philippines*; Morison, *Leyte*; RAdm Worrall Reed Carter, *Beans, Bullets, and Black Oil: The Story of Fleet Logistics Afloat in the Pacific during World War II* (Washington: GPO, 1952), hereafter, Carter, *Beans, Bullets, and Black Oil*; Craven and Cate, *The Pacific*.

⁶ MajGen Oliver P. Smith, "Personal Narrative," p. 62, being a typed copy of Smith's personal journal with the inclusive dates, 28Jan44-1Nov44, hereafter cited as Smith, *Narrative*.

Earlier, on 7 April, while in Pearl Harbor in connection with the planning for the Marianas Operation (FORAGER), Major General Roy S. Geiger, Commanding General, III Amphibious Corps (IIIAC), had been forewarned by Nimitz that his corps would participate in the coming Palau campaign. Immediately upon his return to Guadalcanal and in spite of the scarcity of available information, General Geiger had his staff institute a study of the Palaus, concurrent with its planning for the close-at-hand Guam assault.

Just prior to embarking for the Marianas, Geiger detached a provisional planning staff from IIIAC and sent it to Pearl Harbor, where it became operative on 12 June. Initially headed by Colonel Dudley S. Brown and charged with the planning for the seizure of the Palaus, this group was later redesignated X-Ray Provisional Amphibious Corps, and Major General Julian C. Smith, who possessed sufficient rank and seniority to sustain Marine Corps views in subsequent planning conferences, was placed in command. At this time, General Smith was stationed in Pearl Harbor as Deputy Commander, V Amphibious Corps, and he was to fill both positions for some time.

Because so many echelons had staffs located in the Pearl Harbor area, planning for the Palau campaign benefited from a closer coordination between the various assault and support commands than was customary in similar operations. Right from the start, however, complications arose to plague the planners and high echelon commanders. Unbeknown to them, STALEMATE plans

were to wend an involved and tortuous path and undergo numerous revisions before actual consummation.

The troop basis for the Palau Operation had been predicated upon the use of units already slated for the Marianas, a campaign that proved more difficult and time-consuming than originally estimated. As a result, units earmarked for STALEMATE had become deeply involved in the Marianas fighting. Unless the landing was delayed, it would be impossible to re-equip and ready these forces in sufficient time to meet the deadline of 8 September. Accordingly, CinCPOA directed, on 29 June, that such substitutions or improvisations be made as necessary for the execution of the Palau campaign.

Such last minute shifts of troop assignments, however, did not resolve the problem of insufficient forces. By early July, planners were becoming disturbed by reports that alarming increases in the enemy forces garrisoning Babelthuap and the other islands were occurring. Doubts were voiced about the adequacy of a two-division landing force for the large island. After all, it had taken three divisions 25 days to secure the smaller and less rugged Saipan.

Questions were raised also about the suitability of Babelthuap's terrain for airfield construction, hitherto a contributory reason for its being a target. Peleliu, on the other hand, already had a fine airfield and an auxiliary fighter strip under construction on offshore Ngesebus. Their seizure and rapid development as a base for American planes would permit neutralization of the remaining Japanese-held Palau Is-

lands without the need of actually invading them. In addition, the small island of Yap, Palaus' nearest neighbor, already possessed a good airbase and was a much easier target than Babelthuap.

Although its anchorage facilities was another reason for Babelthuap's capture, the excellent and spacious fleet anchorage at Ulithi Atoll was available at little cost, as the Japanese had only a handful of soldiers outposting it. The substitution of Yap and Ulithi for Babelthuap, with its unfinished airfields and fair anchorage, would provide instead a good operative airbase and a superb fleet anchorage.

Other factors added complications to the STALEMATE planners. Shipping allocated to the Palau Operation was heavily committed to the slow-moving Marianas campaign, as were the available fire support ships. Then in mid-June, the Joint Chiefs of Staff queried the top Pacific commanders as to the possibility of bypassing the Western Carolines completely in exchange for a speedup of the Pacific timetable and an earlier strike at Formosa, or even Japan itself. Only one answer was in the affirmative, that of Admiral William F. Halsey, but the changed strategic picture in the Central Pacific at this time did bring about a radical revision of the proposed Palau Operation.

After a re-examination of the situation, Nimitz cancelled the original Palau concept in favor of a much less ambitious venture. The southern islands of Peleliu and Angaur would still be seized, but the atolls of Ulithi and Yap, known to be easier targets, would be substituted for Babelthuap.

On 7 July, a new warning order was forwarded to all subordinate commands, replacing the earlier one of 29 May. The overall operation, under the new designation of STALEMATE II, was to be a two-phase assault carried out by two separate landing forces. Phase I would consist of the capture of the Southern Palaus and the neutralization of the Babelthuap and Koror areas, while Phase II would involve the seizure of Yap and the Ulithi Atoll. The target date for Phase I was postponed to 15 September 1944, thus coinciding with the assault on Morotai, and the date for the initiation of Phase II was established tentatively as 5 October.

Overall command for the operation resided in Admiral Halsey as Commander, Western Pacific Task Forces. The combat ships of his Third Fleet were to cover the approach of the Joint Expeditionary Forces to their objectives. In addition, he was expected to furnish naval support for the Southwest Pacific Forces simultaneously assaulting Morotai while, in return, General MacArthur's air would aid in the pre-invasion softening up of the Palaus and other air support missions.

Incidentally, out of this planning by Central and Southwest Pacific air liaison officers for STALEMATE II came a most closely coordinated, integrated, and far-reaching series of strategic air support missions. The major objective of the combined operation—gaining control over the eastern approaches of the Luzon - Formosa - China coast area—caused the air planners to widen the scope of the proposed air activities to a degree not encountered in any previous Pacific amphibious undertakings.

The magnitude of Halsey's task is still difficult to imagine. Upon his Third Fleet fell the duty of transporting and protecting the landing forces en route to the target, furnishing the necessary naval gunfire and air support, plus such related support missions as supplying the troops ashore after a beachhead was secured. Before STALEMATE II was over, every major command in the Pacific participated in it, and it eventually involved 800 vessels, 1,600 aircraft, and an estimated 250,000 Navy, Army, and Marine personnel. As the largest naval amphibious venture thus far in the Pacific, the attacking force alone included 14 battleships, 16 carriers, 20 escort carriers, 22 cruisers, 136 destroyers, and 31 destroyer escorts, not counting the numerous types of landing craft or service ships, nor the support ships for the Morotai landing. Supplying such a vast and complicated assortment of men and ships taxed the logistic support of all available Allied commands.

In order to handle adequately the job of shepherding the troop transports and attached vessels to their destination, plus fulfilling related support missions, Admiral Halsey was forced to divide his powerful Third Fleet into two parts. He retained direct control of the Covering Forces and Special Groups (TF 30), and Vice Admiral Theodore S. Wilkinson commanded the Third Amphibious Force (TF 31). For direct support of the landings, TF 31 was further divided into the Eastern Attack Force (TF 33), scheduled for the Yap-Ulithi assaults, and the Western Attack Force (TF 32), which would cover the Peleliu and Angaur operations. Admiral

Wilkinson retained direct control of TF 33, but delegated control of TF 32 to Rear Admiral George H. Fort. This latter force was again divided into the Peleliu Attack Group (TG 32.1, under Fort's tactical control), the Angaur Attack Group (TG 32.2, Rear Admiral William H. P. Blandy), and the Kossol Passage Detachment (TG 32.9, Commander Wayne R. Loud), which had the mission of sweeping the area free of mines and organizing it as a temporary fleet anchorage and seaplane base.

Although the U. S. Navy had the task of transporting, protecting, and landing the assault troops, the man designated to control all ground action for Operation STALEMATE was Major General Julian C. Smith in his role as Commanding General, Expeditionary Troops. Immediate control would be exercised by his subordinate Western and Eastern Landing Forces. The Western Landing Force and Troops, Major General Geiger's IIIAC, would seize Peleliu using the 1st Marine Division (Major General William H. Rupertus) and complete Phase I by capturing Angaur with the 81st Infantry Division (Major General Paul J. Mueller, USA). Phase II, the seizure of Yap and Ulithi, was assigned to the Eastern Landing Force and Troops, commanded by Major General John R. Hodge, USA. He had the XXIV Corps, consisting of two infantry divisions and, upon release by the Western Landing Force and Troops, units of the 81st.

For backup, General Smith had as floating reserve the 77th Infantry Division, which would be embarked at Guam. He also could call upon the newly-

formed 5th Marine Division in area reserve, should the need arise.

With the successful securing of the objectives, General Smith's duties as overall ground commander for STALEMATE II would cease. At this time, the defense and subsequent development of the newly-acquired bases as major airfields and fleet anchorages would become the sole responsibility of Admiral John H. Hoover, Commander, Forward Area, Central Pacific Command.

Except for a few minor redesignations in units and commanders, Phase I plans remained unchanged until D-Day. Upon his return from Guam on 15 August, General Geiger assumed command of X-Ray Provisional Amphibious Corps which was then redesignated IIIAC, and took over command of Western Landing Forces and Troops from General Smith, who then reverted to his higher role as Commanding General, Expeditionary Troops, Third Fleet. Phase II, on the other hand, was destined to undergo still another radical revision due to startling developments arising out of the far-sweeping support actions of the U. S. Navy.

One portion of the Third Fleet's mission was to "Seek out and destroy hostile air and naval forces which threaten interference with the STALEMATE II operations, in order to inflict maximum damage on the enemy and to protect our own forces."⁷ This provision for blunting the enemy's potential to counteract a landing was by this time standard operating procedure in any amphibious undertaking. This time, however, Hal-

sey had ordered his naval officers to seek out every opportunity for engaging the Japanese major naval forces in a decisive sea battle.

In his eagerness to close with the enemy's surface fleet, Halsey made this mission the primary one, overriding the customary one of protecting the landing force. His operation order clearly directed this radical departure from accepted amphibious doctrine by stating, "In case opportunity for the destruction of a major portion of the enemy fleet offers itself or can be created, such destruction will become the primary task."⁸ Subordinate naval echelons, of course, reflected this viewpoint. Admiral Wilkinson directed his heavier warships in the Fire Support Group to "Concentrate and engage enemy task forces encountered. Support the Covering Force or provide striking groups if so directed."⁹ As in the recent Marianas campaign, the covering naval forces for STALEMATE II were on the lookout for a decisive sea battle with the Imperial Fleet rather than being primarily concerned with the protection of the amphibious landing forces.

In hopes of being in on just such a decisive naval engagement, Admiral Halsey personally led the strongest combat component of the Covering Forces and Special Groups, Vice Admiral Marc A. Mitscher's Fast Carrier Task Force (TF 38), out of Eniwetok Atoll on 28 August 1944 for strikes against the Bonins, Palaus, Yap, and Mindanao. Chichi Jima and Iwo Jima were struck by carrier-launched aircraft on 31 Au-

⁷ ComWesPac TFs OPlan No. 14-44, dtd 1Aug44, p. 3.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ TF 31 OPlan A302-44, dtd 4Aug44, p. 3.

gust-2 September, the Palau on 6-8 September, and Mindanao on 9-10 September. Everywhere the enemy's air resistance proved surprisingly weak, and the great success of the last strike persuaded Halsey to shift his intended follow-up attack on Mindanao instead to the Central Philippines.

Exploiting the enemy's weakness by pressing in close to the coast, the carriers of TF 38 actually stationed themselves within sight of the Samar Mountains from 12-14 September, during which time 2,400 sorties were launched against the Visayas bases of the Japanese. The phenomenal success of this air attack, which had achieved tactical surprise, proved dazzling. American pilots claimed the destruction of some 200 enemy planes, the sinking or damaging of many ships, and the infliction of tremendous damage upon Japanese installations. American losses in comparison were minute: 8 planes in combat, 1 operationally, and 10 men.

Halsey could report to his superior that the "Enemy's non-aggressive attitude [was] unbelievable and fantastic."¹⁰ Later he would recall that "We had found the central Philippines a hollow shell with weak defenses and skimpy facilities. In my opinion, this was the vulnerable belly of the Imperial dragon."¹¹

This astonishing victory, coupled with the lack of serious Japanese reaction,

prompted Halsey to send a dispatch to Nimitz stating his belief that "the Palau and Yap-Ulithi operations were unnecessary to support the seizure of the Philippines"¹² and that an invasion of the Leyte-Samar area be undertaken at the earliest possible date using the troops slated for STALEMATE II. Admiral Nimitz passed on the recommendation concerning Phase II to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, but due to commitments already made, he decided Phase I would have to go through as planned.

From then on, events on the strategic stage moved rapidly. In answer to a Joint Chiefs of Staff inquiry about General MacArthur's willingness to advance Leyte's target date if given the troops of XXIV Corps, his staff officers, took it upon themselves—MacArthur was maintaining radio silence on board a cruiser off Morotai—to radio an affirmative reply on 15 September.¹³

Word to this effect was immediately relayed to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, then in Quebec with President Roosevelt for the OCTAGON conference. So impressed were they by this dramatic agreement between the top Pacific Theater commanders that 90 minutes after the dispatch was received they were able to flash their approval. Thus the XXIV Corps departed the Central Pacific to play its important part in the dramatic 'Liberation' campaign.¹⁴

To further compound the difficulties, Halsey on the following day, the second

¹⁰ CinCPac WarD, dtd 14Sep44, p. 1, hereafter *CinCPac WarD*, with appropriate date.

¹¹ FAdm William F. Halsey and LCdr Julian Bryan, III, *Admiral Halsey's Story* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1947), p. 199, hereafter Halsey and Bryan, *Admiral Halsey's Story*.

¹² *ThirdFlt AR*, p. 4.

¹³ George C. Kenney, *General Kenney Reports: A Personal History of the Pacific War* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1949), p. 432, hereafter Kenney, *Reports*, used with permission.

¹⁴ Hough, *Assault on Peleliu*, p. 191.

day of the Peleliu fighting, directed the seizure of Ulithi "as early as practical . . . with resources at hand."¹⁵ The only uncommitted force was the corps reserve, a single regimental combat team (RCT), and its removal from the immediate area would leave the Marines still battling desperately ashore to secure Peleliu without any reinforcements should they be needed.¹⁶ What resulted, however, when this happened, will be narrated later in its proper sequence.

THE JAPANESE BOLSTER DEFENSES¹⁷

The thick veil of secrecy with which the Japanese cloaked their prewar ac-

tivities in the mandated Palaus revealed an early awareness of the military potentialities of the islands. Under the League of Nations' terms, none could be fortified, but Japan's extreme sensitivity concerning them aroused suspicions. As one American visitor stated, "Officials and officers swarm here in such numbers that the visitor does not draw a breath without an appropriate note being made in the archives."¹⁸ Here, it was, also, that a Marine colonel died under very mysterious circumstances in 1923, while traveling in the disguise of a commercial trader.¹⁹

On the other hand, there was no concrete evidence of any extensive fortification of the Palaus prior to World War II. Harbors had been dredged, some naval facilities erected, and an airfield built, but the Peleliu airfield, while pos-

¹⁵ *III PhibFor, STALEMATE II Rpt*, p. 8.

¹⁶ "In explanation of Halsey's decision, 3dPhibFor's serial 00314 of 11 Nov 1944 (p. 8) notes that Halsey acted after receiving a report of the local situation. Further, the RCT was not expected to depart until 21 September and Halsey provided for the use of the RCT in Peleliu prior to that date if the situation required." RAdm E. M. Eller ltr to Hd, HistBr, G-3 Div, HQMC, dtd 18Jul66, in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Eller ltr*.

¹⁷ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *ExTrps SAR; IIIAC Palaus Rpt*; 1stMarDiv, SAR, PalauOp, dtd 16Nov44, hereafter *1st MarDiv SAR*; *Peleliu Comment File*; CinCPac-CinCPOA Bulletin No. 173-45, Japanese Military Caves on Peleliu: 'Know Your Enemy!', dtd 23Jul45; *JICPOA Bulletin No. 17-44*; *JICPOA Bulletin No. 87T-44*, Target Analysis: Palau Islands, dtd 20Jun44, hereafter *JICPOA Bulletin No. 87T-44*; USSBS (Pac), *Interrogations*, II, VAdm Shigeru Fukudome, Cdr Chikataka Nakajima; HistSec, G-2, GHQ, FEC, Japanese Studies in World War II, Japanese Monograph No. 48, *Operations in the Central Pacific*, hereafter *Japanese Ops in the CenPac*; Japanese Research Div, MilHistSec, GHQ, FEC, Japanese Monograph No. 49, *Central Pacific Opera-*

tions Record, Volume II, April-November 1944, hereafter *Japanese CenPac Ops*; Gen MacArthur's Staff, Historical Report of Operations in the Southwest Pacific Area, 2 vols. (Tokyo, 1951), hereafter *MacArthur's History*, with appropriate volume; Saburo Hayashi, in collaboration with Alvin D. Coox, *Kōgun: The Japanese Army in the Pacific War* (Quantico, Va.: The Marine Corps Association, 1959) hereafter Hayashi and Coox, *Kōgun*; Hough, *Assault on Peleliu*; Smith, *Approach to the Philippines*; Morison, *Leyte*.

¹⁸ Willard Price, "Hidden Key to the Pacific," *The National Geographic Magazine*, v. LXXXI, No. 6 (Jun42), p. 784.

¹⁹ For those interested in the mysterious disappearance of Lieutenant Colonel Earl H. Ellis, see: LtCol Philip N. Pierce, USMC, "The Unsolved Mystery of Pete Ellis," *Marine Corps Gazette*, v. 46, No. 2 (Feb62), pp. 34-40, which incorporated the findings of LtCol Waite W. Worden, USMC, who visited Koror in 1950 and interviewed its residents concerning Ellis' death. Copies of Worden's findings are also in the possession of RefBr, HistDiv, HQMC.

sessing great military value, was equally useful for peaceful civilian pursuits.

Immediately following Pearl Harbor, however, the islands served as a jumping-off point for Japan's attack against the Philippines. Out of its naval base had sortied the small carrier task force which launched the first air raids against American forces in the Philippines, while troops staged at the Palaus for the later Philippines land campaign. Afterwards, the islands came to be used primarily as an intermediate staging base and supply point for offensives along the outer perimeter of the Japanese advance. During the struggle for the Solomons, thousands of Imperial soldiers staged through the Palaus, utilizing them as training and practice areas, on their way to the front.

The Japanese high command, during the early stages of the Pacific War, paid slight attention to the ability of the Palaus to defend themselves. The full vigor of Japan's war effort was then concentrated upon the outer fringes of newly conquered territories, where mounting Allied counterattacks absorbed available Japanese troops and war material in ever increasing amounts. Any development of a strategic inner defense line was deferred until dramatic reversals in New Guinea, the Solomons, and other points forced the Imperial war planners to reassess the hopeless battle on the outer perimeter.

Finding herself unable to match the superior Allied air and naval strength, Japan began concentrating her energies upon the creation of a powerful defensive bastion which would halt the Allied advance and hurl it back. Accordingly,

in September 1943, the *Imperial General Headquarters (IGHQ)* at Tokyo created a second line of defense which embraced the areas west of the Marianas-Carolines-Western New Guinea line. It was then decreed that this was the zone of absolute defense where each Japanese soldier would fight to the death.

Initial steps in girding this decisive battle area for the eventual assault called for bolstering the garrisons with first-string combat troops. For the first time in the Pacific War, *IGHQ* planners were forced to draw upon the battle-ready divisions of the *Kwantung Army* in Manchuria. Maintained at peak combat readiness, this unit served the purpose of immobilizing the large number of Russian troops in nearby Siberia, thereby preventing their redeployment to the European front for use against Japan's ally, Germany. The needs of the crucial Pacific sector, however, sent the *35th Division*, among others of the *Kwantung* units, hurrying southward. The *35th* arrived during March 1944 in the Palaus, until then garrisoned only by rear-echelon troops, but it was almost immediately dispatched farther westward to a more critical front, leaving only one understrength regiment to defend the island group.

Earlier in 1944, the American seizure of the Admiralties and Marshalls had brought all of the Carolines within effective striking range of Allied land-based bombers. In the face of this new threat, the *Combined Fleet* transferred its headquarters from the now highly vulnerable Truk to the Palaus, which would be used as a temporary forward naval base until a permanent one could be constructed in the Philippines. No

sooner had the Japanese settled down in their new location, than a successful carrier raid by the U. S. Fifth Fleet in late March denied them the use of the Palaus even temporarily.

This large scale air strike also spurred the defensive efforts of the Japanese Army and caused some drastic reshuffling of troop assignments. Since an American attack was believed imminent, the *14th Division*, already en route from Manchuria, was dispatched with all possible speed to the Palaus. Landing there on 24 April, the *14th* took over the responsibility for the islands' defenses, releasing the regiment of the *35th* to rejoin its parent organization already committed to the fighting farther westward.

To handle the overall task of defending the Central Pacific area, *IGHQ* had established the *Thirty-first Army* with headquarters in the Marianas. Its zone of responsibility stretched along the Bonins-Marianas-Carolines line of the strategic area of absolute defense. The commanding general was to have control over all army units in the theater and be directly responsible to the *Central Pacific Fleet*, but his displeasure in being subordinated to a naval officer precipitated a furious interservice squabble which was smoothed over only when the Navy and Army commanders orally pledged each other not to assume complete responsibility.

With the arrival of the hardened veterans of the *14th Division* on Babelthuap, after a delay while their transports evaded would-be American attackers, an effective defense of the islands approached reality. The *14th* was one of the oldest and best military

units in the Japanese Army, and its infantry regiments, the *2d*, *15th*, and *59th*, all had excellent reputations. Its commanding officer, Lieutenant General Sadae Inoue, was made Commander, *Palau Sector Group*, the organization responsible to the *Thirty-first Army* for the defense of all the Palaus, Yap, and nearby islands. Military units already based in the Palaus, such as the Sea Transport Units (landing craft and crews) of the *1st Amphibious Brigade*, and the service and support troops for the Japanese forces in New Guinea, passed to the control of General Inoue as group commander, who later reorganized them into the *53d Independent Mixed Brigade (IMB)*. Inoue's orders from the superior headquarters were concise:

The Palau Sector Group Commander will secure the Palau Islands (including Angaur) and the Yap Island area. . . . The islands must be held to the very last as the final position barring the enemy from penetrating into the Pacific. Peleliu and Angaur must be fortified as an important air base.²⁰

Within a matter of weeks after his arrival, General Inoue successfully deployed his units in scattered defensive positions. Headquarters of both the division and group, naturally, were located on Koror, the administrative center of the islands, and the major part of the troops were deployed on nearby Babelthuap where Inoue planned to make his final fight.

As the main infantry force on Peleliu, Inoue allocated the *2d Infantry*. Its commander, Colonel Kunio Nakagawa, was designated Commander, *Peleliu*

²⁰ *Japanese Ops in the CenPac*, p. 24.

Sector Unit, which also had artillery, mortar, signal, and light tank units attached to it. The *346th Independent Infantry Battalion* of the *53d IMB* and the *3d Battalion, 15th Infantry*, were also assigned to Nakagawa's command to bolster his combat strength. In addition, the Navy had the *144th* and *126th Anti-aircraft* units, and the *45th Guard Force Detachment*, plus construction units and the airbase personnel. In all, Nakagawa had approximately 6,500 combat troops available for the defense of Peleliu, and the service troops and non-combatants brought his garrison total up to about 10,500.

The *Peleliu Sector Unit* commander confidently expected his troops to man their assigned positions until death, for the Imperial Japanese infantryman, schooled in the strict *Bushido* code of the warrior, prided himself on his tenacious fighting ability without regard for personal safety. The *esprit de corps* of the *15th Infantry*, whose *2d* and *3d Battalions* were destined to be wiped out during the fighting on Peleliu, was typical of the Japanese fighting units. First organized in 1884, the regiment was presented its colors the following year and covered them with great honor in several hard-fought battles. More recently, it had received a citation for a battle in North China. As the regimental commander reported:

All the officers and men carried in mind the meaning of our sacred war, and the leaders, burning with the will to be 'Breakwater of the Pacific,' and feeling the obligation of this important duty, and being a picked Manchukuoan regiment that does not expect to return alive and will follow to the death an imperial order, devoted themselves to the endeavor of being the

type of soldier who can fight hundreds of men. . . .

Using all wisdom especially while acquiring our antilanding training we will overcome the hardships of warfare and under the battle flag which displays our battle glory we vow with our unbreakable solidarity we will complete our glorious duty and establish the 'Breakwater of the Pacific.'²¹

Such was the caliber of the men slated to fight to the last in a hopeless struggle on Peleliu. About the only Japanese lacking this fanatical viewpoint were those portions of the naval garrison consisting of the labor troops and the Korean labor force. Most of these noncombatants, however, were forced by the combat troops to resist aggressively the American attacks; only a few ever succeeded in surrendering.

On Angaur, Inoue stationed the *59th Infantry*, less one battalion. Late in July, however, most of these infantrymen were withdrawn to strengthen Babelthuap where the main attack was expected, leaving only the *1st Battalion* as garrison. Its commander, Major Ushio Goto, was then assigned as Commander, *Angaur Sector Unit*. His remaining garrison forces totaled some 1,400 men, including supporting artillery, antiaircraft, mortar, engineer, and service units.

Within easy reinforcing distance of both Peleliu and Angaur were some 25,000 troops on the other Palau Islands, many specially trained in amphibious operations. Among the other places under General Inoue's command, only Yap was heavily garrisoned. As

²¹ CinCPac-CinCPOA Item No. 9764, "Report on the 15th Infantry Regiment," dtd 16May44.

late as 27 August 1944, American intelligence officers reported its defending forces as 8,000 to 10,000 men.²²

Immediately upon assuming responsibility for the defense of the *Palau Sector Group*, General Inoue became bogged down in that long-standing rivalry between the Japanese Army and Navy. The naval officers had regarded the Palaus as their own private domain for so long that the sudden arrival of a lieutenant general, senior to their own commander, aroused their excessive sensitivity and displeasure.

The Army commander, right from the start, was made to feel the Navy's resentment over the new state of affairs. Inoue found it practically impossible to obtain civilian help in erecting fortifications, for the Navy had already monopolized all available labor and organized the workers into pools to be used for naval projects only. Nor would the naval officers allow any Army personnel to utilize their caves or installations. As a result, Inoue had to drive his men night and day in a frantic effort to prepare adequate defensive positions quickly. The situation became unusually severe on Peleliu, where the Navy garrison was commanded by a flag officer—who was, of course, senior to Colonel Nakagawa. Finally, in desperation, Inoue assigned his next senior officer, Major General Kenjiro Murai, in nominal command of the Peleliu garrison in order to make any progress at all in fortifying the island.

There was also another reason for General Murai's presence on Peleliu.

Since the group commander considered the island's airfields of prime importance, he had selected his most able officer, Colonel Nakagawa, to direct its defense. As Inoue explained in a postwar interview, he had assigned Murai to Peleliu while leaving Nakagawa in actual command for two reasons. First, Inoue wanted to remove the pressure of naval animosity from Nakagawa's shoulders and second, as a form of insurance, "to see that Colonel Nakagawa didn't make any mistakes."²³ This unusual arrangement proved unnecessary, as later events indicated that all orders right up to the bitter end of the fighting were issued in Nakagawa's name.

Actually, the Palaus' defenses actively entered into the strategic defense plans of *IGHQ* only for the relatively brief period from April to July 1944. During this time, men and supplies were rushed to the islands to hasten their preparations for an expected imminent assault. With the successful American attack upon the Marianas, however, the greater strategic value of the Philippines necessitated the writing off of the Palaus and their garrisons and the concentration of all available strength in the Philippines area.

The overshadowing importance of the Philippines also caused a lack of Japanese air support for the Palaus, a serious flaw in their defense preparations. Most, if not all, of the planes already in the Palaus were destroyed in the Fifth Fleet's carrier raid of late March, when jubilant American fliers claimed a total of 168 aircraft destroyed. At any

²² 96th InfDiv, STALEMATE II FO No. 14, dtd 27Aug44, Anx B, p. 1.

²³ LtCol Waite W. Worden ltr to CMC, dtd 4Apr50, in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Worden ltr*,

rate, none of the Peleliu-based Japanese airplanes survived the pre-invasion bombardment; only a few float planes at Koror escaped intact. Nor could replacements be spared. By this time, Japan's aircraft reserves were becoming limited. Besides, all available planes were being hoarded for the planned decisive battle to be forced with the Americans in the Philippines.

Even though written off by *IGHQ* strategists, the doomed Palau garri- sons were expected to conduct a tenacious defense in the event of American attack, thereby delaying utilization of the coveted airfields by the invaders. Besides, combat losses to the assaulting units would delay their reemployment in future campaigns. Time, a most precious commodity in war, would be gained by the Japanese for perfecting defenses in more strategic areas.

By July 1944, also, the point had finally been driven home to the Japanese high command that a blind adherence to the usual doctrine of attempting to annihilate the invaders on the beach was futile. Recent battles involving American amphibious assaults against well-fortified beaches revealed that the Americans' ability to unleash a devastating preparatory bombardment made total reliance upon beach defense useless.

Only one limited success stood out. Instead of uselessly expending his forces in suicidal *Banzai* counterattacks, the Japanese commander at Biak had prolonged the fighting substantially by having his men dig in, thus forcing the Americans to rout out each defender in a long, bloody, mopping-up campaign. This successful innovation, the pro-

tracted resistance on Saipan, and the long list of failures of Japanese commanders in attempting to hold the beachline, undoubtedly spurred the *IGHQ* planners to undertake a detailed study of the problem.

As a result, *IGHQ* decided in July 1944 on a new approach, and orders to employ new tactics in protracted ground battles were circulated to all Japanese commands in the Pacific. Briefly, these tactics involved the preparation of a main line of resistance far enough inland from the beach to minimize the effects of the pre-invasion bombardment, the organization of a defense in depth designed to wear down the attacking forces, and the hoarding of sufficient reserves to mount successful counterattacks at the appropriate times.

On 11 July 1944, General Inoue issued "Palau Sector Group Training for Victory," a document incorporating the new defensive concepts of *IGHQ*. His instructions revealed a departure from Japanese tactics employed earlier in the Pacific war and a unique attempt by the Japanese to profit from past errors. Inoue's instructions emphasized that victory would depend upon "our thorough application of recent battle lessons, especially those of Saipan,"²⁴ and that the "ultimate goal of this training is to minimize our losses in the severe enemy pre-landing naval and aerial bombardment." Among other things, Inoue urged the holding back of sufficient reserves in prepared defensive positions inland to permit a massive

²⁴ All quotes from this document were taken from CinCPac-CinCPOA Item No. 11,190, "Palau Sector Group Headquarters: Palau Sector Group Training for Victory," dtd 11Jul44.

counterattack and the destruction of the invaders in one fell swoop before their beachhead became secure. In deploying these reserve troops for the attack, careful attention was to be given so that there "will be no rapid exhaustion of battle strength," and the soldiers were to advance "at a crawl, utilizing terrain, natural objects and shell holes." As a last resort, he instructed the "construction of strong points from which we can cover our airfields up to the last moment, regardless of the situation," and it was Inoue's contention that "if we repay the Americans (who rely solely upon material power) with material power it will shock them beyond imagination."

As it turned out, Peleliu was where the battle was joined and the wisdom of Inoue's defensive tactics tested. Basically, the Japanese planned their troop and weapon dispositions on the island for a defense in depth. The resulting defense system was well organized and carefully integrated, and it possessed great inherent strength and flexibility. The enemy utilized the rugged terrain to construct mutually supporting defensive positions, and Peleliu was divided into four sectors, each manned by a reinforced battalion, with another one in reserve.

Regardless of which beaches the Americans chose to land on, they would be resisted by the major portion of Colonel Nakagawa's available forces. Swift redeployment of his troops would be possible, since the Japanese commander had the advantage of interior lines to operate over. Nor would naval or air attempts at interdiction prevent this concentration, for the earlier American

air raids had been utilized by the Japanese to provide actual troop training in advancing under fire. Detailed plans dealing with proposed counterattacks were prepared and rehearsed. A few infantry companies were even reorganized into special counterattack units, rather than in the conventional platoons. Most companies also had several teams of two to three men prepared to infiltrate and to knock out attacking tanks.

To forestall an invasion of Peleliu, all potential landing beaches were heavily mined with mine belts often extending 100 yards or so inland. Offshore obstacles were erected, anti-tank barriers constructed, and barbed wire strung. Everywhere, the dominating terrain was utilized for the placement of artillery, previously zeroed-in on the beaches, to wreak havoc among the assaulting troops. All defensive positions took full advantage of man-made and natural cover and concealment, while yet dominating all invasion approaches (See Map 3).

Peleliu's southwestern beaches, where the American assault actually came, were typical of the Japanese beach defense preparations. The natural offshore obstacles there were augmented by the effective positioning of tetrahedron-shaped tank obstacles, strung barbed wire, and over 300 single and double-horned anti-invasion mines. The beaches themselves and all routes leading inland were strewn with tangled barbed wire and land mines, as well as with huge aerial bombs adapted to serve as mines. To prevent advancing infantrymen from working their way through the obstacles on the beaches under the covering fire of their tanks, long antitank

trenches running roughly parallel to the beaches were dug.

These antitank ditches, as well as the beaches, were covered by fields of fire from pillboxes and gun casemates, located in dominating positions and all linked together in a system of mutual cover and support. The casemates mounted 37mm or 47mm antiboat and antitank guns, and were made of reinforced concrete with coral packed against the sides and over the top.

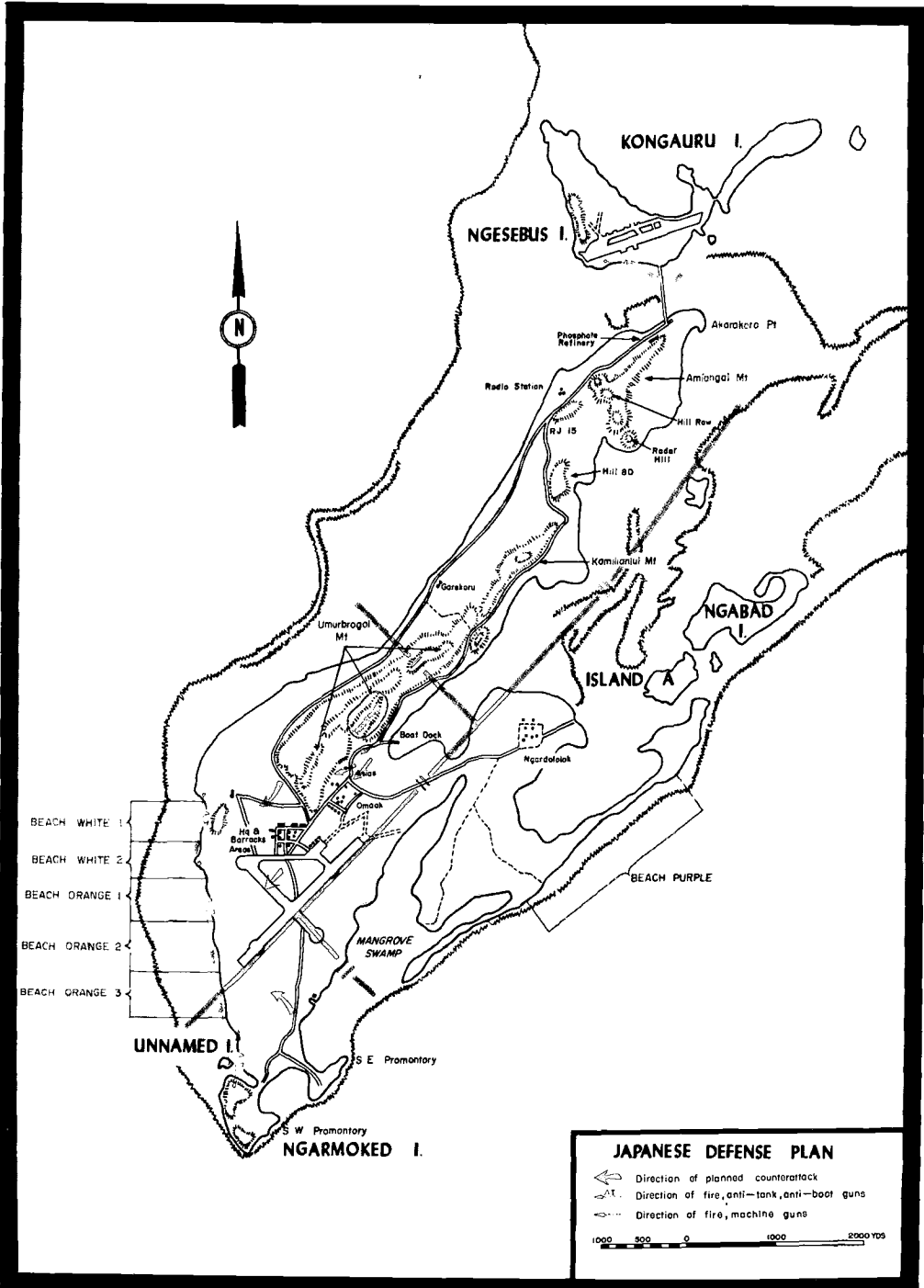
Just to the north of the beaches, a natural fortress formed by a prominent coral hill was riddled with covered rifle pits and pillboxes, each large enough for two or three infantrymen armed with rifles or automatic weapons. Near the base of the cliff was a reinforced concrete casemate housing a 47mm gun which could provide enfilade fire on approaching amphibious waves or interdictory fire on the beaches. Peleliu's southwestern promontory and a small island, a few hundred yards offshore, were used for the location of anti-boat guns and machine guns to furnish enfilade fire.

On the flat terrain farther inland from the beaches, the defense consisted of direct fire against advancing troops from well-camouflaged pillboxes and other defensive positions, while observed artillery and mortar fire could be laid down from the dominating ridges to the north of the airfield. Dug into these ridges were pillboxes and a casemate for a 75mm mountain gun, which commanded the entire southern portion of the island. At least one steel-reinforced concrete blockhouse had as many as 16 mutually supporting automatic weapons.

If the invaders survived the landing and were able to consolidate the beachhead, the Japanese planned to fall back to previously prepared defensive positions that commanded the ground between them and the attacking forces. If all else failed and the secondary line of defense was overrun and the commanding ground seized, last ditch resistance would center around the extensive cave fortifications that literally honeycombed the rugged terrain of northern Peleliu. Below is a description of the area by a former Marine, who was wounded in the fighting:

It was this high ground which made Peleliu so perfectly adaptable to defense-in-depth, for it was neither ridge nor mountain but an undersea coral reef thrown above the surface by a subterranean volcano. Sparse vegetation growing in the thin topsoil atop the bedrock had concealed the Umurbrogol's crazy contours from the aerial camera's eye. It was a place that might have been designed by a maniacal artist given to painting mathematical abstractions—all slants, jaggeds, straights, steeps, and sheers with no curve to soften or relieve. Its highest elevation was 300 feet in the extreme north overlooking the airfield-islet of Ngesebus 1,000 yards offcoast there. But no height rose more than 50 feet before splitting apart in a maze of peaks and defiles cluttered with boulders and machicolated with caves. For the Umurbrogol was also a monster Swiss cheese of hard coral limestone pocked beyond imagining with caves and crevices. They were to be found at every level, in every size—crevices small enough for a lonely sniper, eerie caverns big enough to station a battalion among its stalactites and stalagmites."²⁵

²⁵ Robert Leckie, *Strong Men Armed: The United States Marines Against Japan* (New York: Random House, 1962), p. 391, used with permission.



Map 3

E. L. Wilson

The Umurbrogol ridges were, of course, the key to a successful defense of Peleliu, and the Japanese made the utmost use of its rugged terrain. They developed the natural caves that existed practically everywhere or blasted others into the almost perpendicular cliffs in order to deploy their troops and locate their weapons for a last-ditch stand. If driven from prepared positions, enemy soldiers could take refuge in the abundant natural cavities in the ridges, and by sniping from and defending every cave, crack, or crevice large enough for a man to squeeze into, could tenaciously prolong the resistance.

Due to bitter inter-service rivalry, both the Army and the Navy independently developed their own caves. The Navy, with the help of the *214th Naval Construction Battalion* and a tunnel construction unit, was able to build some rather elaborate underground installations. These were located mainly in the north of Peleliu and consisted for the most part of tunnels, ranging from single ones up to networks of 10 or more. The hollowed-out chambers usually measured 10 feet across and 6 feet high, often with separate rooms for food and ammunition storage, living quarters, and medical facilities. Some even had the benefits of electric lights, ventilation systems, and wooden floors. Designed primarily as shelters against air and naval bombardment, these underground positions had no prepared defenses against the onslaughts of attacking infantry/tank teams.

The Army's caves, on the other hand, while not so large, elaborate, nor ingeniously constructed as those of the Navy, were built and prepared for pro-

longed land combat. Whenever practicable, two or more staggered levels were constructed, and the multiple entrances led to tortuous passageways within a single huge tunnel system, where any number of safe refuges would protect the occupants from the concussive effect of bombing and shelling and provide cover from direct fire. Every effort, of course, was taken to camouflage skillfully all cave openings, while still preserving protection and clear fields of fire. Siege defense preparations consisted of jamming every nook and crevice with food and ammunition and building troughs to collect the water dripping from overhead stalactites.

Tactical reasons alone determined the location of the Army's caves. Fortifications were built, weapons sited, and soldiers deployed in order to provide a mutually interlocking system of concrete pillboxes, entrenchments, gun emplacements, and riflemen's positions dominating the strategic areas. Near every important artillery or mortar emplacement were other underground dwellings housing automatic weapons to provide protective fire. Communication trenches or tunnels connected these mutually supporting locations, while observation posts often were placed on top of the ridge in a natural limestone cavity or crevice. The approaches to vital installations, such as command posts, were covered from all angles by fire from cleverly located caves half way up the surrounding ridges. At most strategic points and in the final defensive area were numerous smaller underground positions designed to provide interlocking support fire from small arms. These were intended to be held

to the death, and no escape routes had been provided for their occupants.

With their final defensive positions prepared, the Japanese garrison on Peliu could view the future only gloomily. After July, when the Palaus were written off by the Imperial high command, whose attention was centered on the approaching decisive battle in the Philippines, even the receipt of the more essential supplies dwindled to a mere trickle due to shipping losses by attacks from American submarines and aircraft. The future prospects seemed dim indeed.

The Americans had the choice of either assaulting the islands or bypassing them, thereby allowing the Japanese garrison to degenerate into a state of combat ineffectiveness through lack of supplies and food. If the invasion came, then the enemy soldier faced the dilemma of either surrendering or waging a bitter fight to the death. No hope of relief or reinforcements could be expected.

After communications with the *Thirty-first Army's* headquarters on Saipan ceased in August, the *Palau Sector Group* was reassigned by *IGHQ*, for administrative purposes, to the *Southern Army* which controlled operations in the Philippines, and operationally to *Headquarters, Combined Fleet*. When advance intelligence indicated an imminent American assault, it was the *Southern Army* that notified General

Inoue on 3 September as to the probable time and place of the landing. A few days later, Japanese intelligence officers estimated the size of the attacking force to be probably a division. Just before the actual invasion, the Japanese learned that the assault force commander was Major General Julian C. Smith.

General Inoue immediately notified all of the forces under his command that the long awaited opportunity to annihilate the Americans was near at hand. But as late as 8 September, *Palau Sector Group Headquarters* thought the carrier strikes might be just feinting actions, with the main assault coming elsewhere. When the heavy calibered shells of the American battleships began falling on 12 September, however, Inoue knew, without doubt, that the decisive moment had arrived. With great eloquence, he informed his command of the approaching battle:

This battle may have a part in the decisive turn of tide in breaking the deadlock of the 'Great Asiatic War.' The entire Army and people of Japan are expecting us to win this battle. There will never be another chance as these few existing days for the people living in the empire to repay the emperor's benevolence again. Rouse yourselves for the sake of your country! Officers and men, you will devote your life to the winning of this battle, and attaining your long cherished desire of annihilating the enemy.²⁰

²⁰ *Japanese Ops in the CenPac*, p. 75.

Pre-Assault Preparations¹

THE BEACH AND THE PLAN²

Detailed planning by the assault unit scheduled for the Peleliu landing began

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the information for this chapter has been derived from: ComWes-Pac TF OPlan No. 14-44, dtd 1Aug44; *Third-Flt AR; III PhibFor STALEMATE II Rpt*; TF 31 OPlan A302-44, dtd 4Aug44; *ExTrps SAR*; ExTrps OPlan No. 1-44, dtd 9Jul44; TF 32 Rpt of Amph Op to Capture Peleliu and Angaur, dtd 16Oct44, hereafter *TF 32 Peleliu and Angaur Rpt*; TF 32 OPlan A501-44, dtd 15Aug44; *IIIAC Palaus Rpt*; *1st MarDiv SAR*; *1st MarDiv WarDs*, Jun-Sep44, hereafter *1st MarDiv WarD*, with appropriate date; *1st MarDiv OPlan 1-44*, dtd 15Aug44; *Peleliu Comment File*; Smith, *Narrative*; Hough, *Assault on Peleliu*; George McMillan, *The Old Breed: A History of the First Marine Division in World War II* (Washington: Infantry Journal Press, 1949), hereafter McMillan, *The Old Breed*; Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*; Isely and Crowl, *U.S. Marines and Amphibious War*; Morison, *Leyte*; Smith, *Approach to the Philippines*; Craven and Cate, *The Pacific*; The 81st Wildcat Division Historical Committee, *The 81st Infantry Wildcat Division in World War II* (Washington: Infantry Journal Press, 1948), hereafter Historical Committee, *81st Infantry Division*.

² Additional sources used for this section are: WesLandFor, *STALEMATE II*, OPlan No. 1-44, dtd 23Jul44; 7th Mar OPlan No. 1-44, dtd 1Aug44; Theodore Roscoe, *United States Submarine Operations in World War II* (Annapolis, Maryland: United States Naval Institute, 1949), hereafter Roscoe, *Submarine*; Cdr Francis Douglas Fane, USNR, and Don Moore, *The Naked Warriors* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1956), hereafter Fane and Moore, *The Naked Warriors*.

on 2 June 1944, when CinCPOA's warning order of 29 May was received by the 1st Marine Division. It was now resting and reorganizing on Pavuvu in the Russells, a small island group about 65 miles northwest of Guadalcanal, having arrived there in April following the strenuous New Britain campaign.

Although Major General Rupertus was absent in Washington arranging for replacements, Brigadier General Oliver P. Smith, the Assistant Division Commander, immediately initiated a staff study of the proposed assault. As soon as the G-2 officer assembled all available maps and aerial photographs of Peleliu and adjacent islands, the staff members began a careful examination of the beaches. In spite of the fact that higher echelons provided very little guidance during this early phase of the planning or that little intelligence of the island was available, the division managed to have a workable plan by the time of the commanding general's return.

Knowledge of Peleliu's beaches and terrain came almost solely from photographs, for it was nearly impossible to land a reconnaissance patrol and expect it to scout successfully the interior of the small, strongly-held island. The Fifth Fleet's carrier strike in March had made the first systematic aerial surveillance of the Palaus, and subsequent flights by carrier planes and the

land-based aircraft of the Fifth Air Force obtained up-to-date vertical and oblique shots of the island chain. In addition, photographic profiles of all potential beaches were taken by the submarine, USS *Seawolf*, during the period 23-28 June.

A month later, another submarine surfaced off Peleliu with the intention of landing small underwater demolition teams (UDTs) by rubber boats. Bright moonlit nights, coupled with active Japanese radar and constant air and sea patrols, however, kept the USS *Burrfish* submerged for two weeks, during which time it could only take periscope photographs of the island's shore lines. Finally, on a dark night, a five-man landing party succeeded in paddling ashore on a beach later used in the assault. Much valuable data was obtained, but vital beach information, such as depth of water, nature of shoals, and type of bottom, had to wait upon the explorations of the UDTs working under the protective cover of naval gunfire just prior to the landing.

The intelligence officers of X-Ray Provisional Amphibious Corps regularly passed on to the 1st Marine Division and other assault units the latest maps and photographs as well as the current estimate of the enemy's strength. The standard map of Peleliu for the operation was compiled by CinCPOA cartographers and drawn on a scale of 1:20,000. Although the map contained some errors, it was workable and accurate for most of the island. Front line units received blown-up sections on the larger scale of 1:10,000 and 1:5,000. Following the fortuitous capture on Saipan of certain 31st Army Headquarters

files, Americans knew almost to a man the size of the Japanese garrisons in the Palaus. Although modified by later findings, this estimate served as the basis for tactical planning by the assault forces.

Right from the start, the Marine planners noted that the Peleliu landing would be different from any of the 1st Marine Division's earlier operations. To cross the 600-700-yard reef all along the prospective beachhead—similar to the situation encountered at Tarawa—would necessitate transporting the troops, equipment, and supplies across the coral obstacles solely by amphibian tractors. In addition, while the southern part of the island was flat and low, like an atoll, the parallel ridges just to the north of the airfield possessed some of the most rugged and easily defended terrain yet encountered by American forces in the Pacific. Peleliu, therefore, would repeat many of the difficulties encountered at Tarawa, as well as some which were met on Saipan.³

Although Peleliu abounded with beaches suitable in size for a division landing, the Marine staff quickly selected the western ones as being most preferable. The eastern beaches, backed by sprawling swamps that would hinder movement inland, had been discarded early, as were the extreme northern ones which were too far from the

³ "The 1st Marine Division, while experienced in other amphibious operations, had not previously landed over a coral reef. They were short of amtracs and very deficient in mine detection and disposal." Vice Admiral George H. Fort, USN (Ret) ltr to Head, HistBr, G-3 Div, HQMC dtd 18May66 in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Fort ltr*.

prime objective of the assault, the airfield.

The division planners finally narrowed the choice down to three courses of action: (1) to land on the beaches overlapping the airfield; (2) to land on the beaches overlapping the airfield, while at the same time landing on the two promontories at the southern end of the island; or (3) to land on the beaches north of the airfield.

At first, the Marine officers had leaned toward the idea of making a two-pronged assault, with one regiment landing on the southern promontories while another one attacked across the beaches overlapping the airfield. Later, however, a more complete photographic coverage revealed that the promontories were strongly fortified and that the reef between them was covered with concrete tetrahedrons and was heavily sown with mines. An expert in UDT techniques warned, also, that the pill-boxes ringing the coves could prohibit demolition work on the reef. The third possibility, landing in the north, was discarded because the ground rose abruptly into jungle-covered cliffs which would deprive the division of maneuver space.

By the time General Rupertus returned on 21 June, his staff members felt that an attack over the western beaches overlapping the airfield best favored success; after making his own estimate, the division commander agreed. The code name of White and Orange were given to the selected beaches.

Although the 1st Marine Division's staff inaugurated the detailed planning for the Peleliu landing, the amphibious

corps slated for the assault (X-Ray— redesignated IIIAC on 15 August 1944) passed on the proposed plan before giving it a stamp of approval. For instance, when Rupertus wanted to assault the objective with two regiments, holding the other afloat as reserve, General Julian C. Smith recommended a simultaneous landing by three infantry regiments, with a RCT of the 81st Infantry Division as division reserve. After returning from Guam and assuming charge of X-Ray, General Geiger ruled that the Marine division would land with three regiments abreast, less one battalion landing team as the division's sole reserve.

The reserve's small size was not considered risky, for the embarked troops of the 81st Infantry Division were not to be committed to the Angaur landing until the situation on Peleliu had passed the critical assault phase. In addition, one RCT of the 81st was to be held afloat as corps reserve. Disturbing for the future, however, was Rupertus' apparent unwillingness to make use of available Army troops. This early reluctance foreshadowed the division commander's marked refusal, later, to employ Army units as reinforcements during the critical first week ashore on Peleliu.

General Smith, as the Marine Corps spokesman during the inter-service planning, took exception to the Navy's proposal for Angaur's seizure before the Peleliu landing. This course of action, the general explained, would permit the Japanese to rush reinforcements from Babelthup down the island chain onto Angaur, thus prolonging the fighting there. To seize Peleliu first, he ar-

gued, would make it impossible for additional enemy troops to reach Angaur. Eventually, the naval planning staff was brought around to Smith's way of thinking "but, desiring Angaur for construction of a second airfield, continued throughout to press for the earliest possible landing on that island."⁴

As finally approved, the scheme of maneuver for the Peleliu assault called for the landing of three RCTs abreast on a 2,200-yard-wide beachhead, followed by a drive straight across the island to seize the airfield and to divide the enemy forces. On order, a reinforced battalion would make a shore-to-shore assault against Ngesebus Island and capture its fighter strip.

On the left (north) flank of the beachhead, over the White Beaches, the 1st Marines would land two of its battalions abreast, with the remaining one in regimental reserve. After driving inland and helping to secure the airfield, the regiment was to pivot left and attack toward the high ground north of the airfield.

Landing in the center over Beaches Orange 1 and 2, the 5th Marines would use two battalions in assault and one in support. While the left battalion tied in with elements of the 1st Marines, the other assaulting battalion would push straight across the island to the eastern

shore. The support battalion, to be landed at H plus 1, would attack across the airfield and then participate in a wheeling movement northward. Once the airfield was captured, the mission of the 5th Marines would be to seize the northeastern peninsula and its nearby islets.

Only one beach, Orange 3, was assigned to the 7th Marines, for it was to land in a column of battalions, with its 2d Battalion remaining afloat as division reserve. The first battalion ashore was to attack eastward in conjunction with the 5th Marines, while the following battalion was to swing right and attack southward. After the opposite shore had been reached, all of the might of the 7th would be thrown into a push to the southern promontories, wiping out any Japanese hold-outs in that area.

The 11th Marines, reinforced by the 8th 155mm Gun Battalion and the 3d 155mm Howitzer Battalion, both from corps artillery, was to land on order after H plus 1 over the Orange Beaches. Once ashore, the regiment would set up so that its 1st and 2d Battalions would be in direct support of the 1st and 5th Marines, respectively, while its 3d and 4th Battalions, together with the corps artillery, would be in support of the division. Four hours after the 11th Marines was ashore, all battalions were to be prepared to mass their fires on the ridges north of the airfield. In addition, the 8th 155mm Gun Battalion had the assignment of locating its artillery pieces so as to provide supporting fire for the Army division's later assault on Angaur.

⁴ LtGen Julian C. Smith intvw by Maj Frank O. Hough, dtd 23Nov49, as cited in Hough, *Assault on Peleliu*, p. 11. In rebuttal of the above, the Naval Histories Division has commented: "We are unable to locate documentation in our records supporting General Smith's statement that the Navy proposed to seize Angaur prior to Peleliu." *Eller ltr.*

The scheme of maneuver selected by the division commander contained the best features of the two discarded courses of action. The approach to the White and Orange beaches avoided the enemy-emplaced hazards on the reef off the southern beach. Once ashore, the massed division could attack inland swiftly over the low flat ground that was well-suited for the employment of tanks. Such a rapid advance would quickly gain the island's airfield, uncover maneuver room for the division, and strike the main enemy beach defenses on the east coast from the rear. With the early seizure of the opposite shore, the division could operate multiple unloading points in order to speed up the disgorging of the thousands of tons of cargo needed to sustain the offensive.

The scheme did have one real danger, however. The Marines would be forced to attack across the low flat ground while the dominating ridges remained in enemy hands. The Japanese were sure to have guns of large caliber emplaced on those commanding heights. Nevertheless, the division officers willingly accepted this risk, because of the scheme's other obvious advantages. They also figured that the 7th Marines would easily mop up the southern portion of Peleliu on the first day, after which it could help the 1st Marines take the key ridges north of the airfield. Until such time as the combined striking power of the two RCTs could be massed against the defenders on the ridges, the 1st Marines would be supported by the concentrated

fire of planes, gunfire ships, artillery, and tanks.

Even with the benefit of hindsight, it still is difficult to challenge the Marine officers' reasoning. After the war, however, some criticism was raised as to whether there would have been fewer Marine dead, if the landing had taken place on the north beaches at the foot of the commanding ridges.⁵ Granted that a successful assault at this point could have given the division control of the key terrain early in the campaign, anything less than 100 percent execution would have been fatal. If the momentum of the initial assault failed to seize the ridgeline, then the Marines would have been stranded on a narrow low beachhead, without room to maneuver or emplace supporting artillery, while the enemy would be literally looking down their throats.

The unanimity of opinion among Marines who participated in the operation and later had a chance to examine the island's terrain and Japanese defenses in great detail is that the correct course of action was taken. Typical of their attitude is the following comment:

None of the remaining beaches which might permit a landing in force would allow the rapid development of an adequate beachhead which is so essential in a landing operation. The Division Command was confronted with the problem of select-

⁵ See McMillan, *The Old Breed*, p. 262, and Fletcher Pratt, *The Marines' War: An Account of the Struggle for the Pacific from Both American and Japanese Sources* (New York: William Sloane Associates, Inc., 1948), p. 345, hereafter Pratt, *The Marines' War*.

ing the least undesirable of several beaches. In the light of those factors as well as the later developments, the correctness of the decision to land on the White and Orange beaches is hardly open to question.⁹

LOGISTIC CONSIDERATIONS⁷

While the assault Marines received more newspaper coverage than did the logistic commands, the latter are, of course, just as essential to victory on the battlefield. The service units, performing the unquoted tasks of tending the wounded, furnishing tactical and logistical transport, providing all combat equipment and supplies, and repairing troop weapons, vehicles and other equipment, were a decisive factor behind every successful amphibious landing in the Pacific War. STALEMATE II was no exception.

To supply the vast and complex assortment of ships, equipment, and troops required for the Palau Operation, all the major Pacific commands had to be called upon for support. Only the closest liaison among these various echelons made it possible for logistic preparations to proceed smoothly. "Overall

requirements for supplies, materials, and service personnel needed for the Palau operations were ascertained by joint study. Policies affecting the Army, Navy, and Marines were implemented by interservice and intra-staff planning."⁸ Available shipping, always a limiting factor in amphibious undertakings, had to be tightly scheduled, while the estimated arrival dates of the cargo vessels bringing the heavier base development equipment directly from the United States had to be carefully calculated.

The basic guidelines for STALEMATE II's logistic planning were set forth on 1 August 1944 by Admiral Halsey's Operation Plan 14-44, which also instructed all combatant and auxiliary ships to make a special effort to ensure they sailed from the mounting points for the target with the maximum authorized loads of ammunition, fuel, and fresh provisions. Now began an intense period of activity as all the major bases of the Pacific commands pitched in to provide the necessary logistic support, and a 24-hour workday with 12-hour shifts became the norm.

While the various warships and cargo ships took on dry provisions, the fleet tankers loaded to half capacity with Diesel oil and aviation gasoline and topped to maximum draft with fuel oil. Fresh and frozen foods, however, were available only in limited quantities, and battleships, cruisers, and carriers were provisioned to serve at least one completely dry ration every sixth day. By the last part of August, the stocks had been exhausted, and a Marine unit re-

⁹ BGen Walter A. Wachtler ltr to CMC, dtd 1Mar50, in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Wachtler ltr*.

⁷ Additional sources used for this section are: ExTrps AdminO No. 1-44, dtd 22Jul44; 1st MarDiv AdminO No. 1-44, dtd 7Aug44; USAFor-MidPac and Predecessor Commands during World War II, 7Dec41-2Sep45, History of G-4 Section, n.d., hereafter *USAFFor MidPac G-4 Hist*; Carter, *Beans, Bullets, and Black Oil*; Kenneth W. Condit, Gerald Diamond, and Edwin T. Turnbladh, *Marine Corps Ground Training in World War II* (Washington: HistBr, G-3, HQMC, 1956), hereafter Condit, Diamond, and Turnbladh, *Marine Corps Ground Training*.

⁸ *USAFFor MidPac G-4 Hist*, p. 408.

questing fresh meat and vegetables for its troops was forced to sail for Peleliu with only a supply of emergency rations instead.

All types of vessels, from the 90,000-ton floating dry-dock to the hospital ships, steamed toward the designated staging areas. In the Tulagi-Purvis Bay region of the Solomons alone, there were gathered at one time 255 vessels, with ship movements averaging 122 daily during the last week of August. From the far reaches of the Pacific, the various vessels began to rendezvous at the mounting areas of Manus, in the Admiralty Islands, about 1,000 miles in a southwesterly direction from the objective, and Eniwetok Atoll, some 1,500 miles northeast of Peleliu.

The IIIAC assault elements and accompanying garrison forces were directed by Headquarters, Expeditionary Troops, to carry with them sufficient rations for 32 days, water enough for 5 days when pro-rated at 2 gallons per man per day, medical supplies to last 30 days, and a 20-day supply of clothing, fuel, lubricants, and miscellaneous equipment. For the assault phase, all weapons would be allowed five units of fire—a unit of fire being that amount of ammunition which CinCPOA had determined from previous campaigns would last for one day of heavy fighting.⁹ In addition, the 105mm howitzers

would be issued another two units, and the 57mm antitank guns supplied with five more. The 1st Marine Division, moreover, arranged to carry an additional 10 units of flamethrower fillers and explosives, since it expected to encounter numerous fortified positions on Peleliu.

Detailed planning for Marine and naval cooperation during the Peleliu assault began 8 August, when a joint conference at Pavuvu was attended by the staffs of General Rupertus and Admiral Fort, commander of the Western Attack Force. At this time, the division's proposed scheme of maneuver was presented, thus permitting Admiral Fort to determine what support would be required of his force. Naval gunfire and air support plans were worked on jointly by the respective staff members concerned with these matters, and the use of UDTs for clearing away underwater obstacles and the selection of potential landing beaches for the various amphibious craft were discussed in detail.

Two days later, the Commander of Transport Group 3, the division's assigned lift, arrived with members of his staff. This time, the regimental commanders and their staffs joined the conferences planning the combat loading of the assault forces for the Peleliu operation.¹⁰ During this phase of joint planning, the details of boat allocation,

⁹ *1st MarDiv SAR*, Part III to Anx C, lists the number of rounds in the CinCPOA unit of fire for the various weapons in the Marine division. The unit of fire for the M-1 rifle, for example was 100 rounds; .30 caliber carbine, 45; .45 caliber pistol, 14; .30 caliber machine gun, 1,500; .50 caliber machine gun, 600; 60mm and 81 mm mortars, 100; 105mm howitzers,

200; 155mm howitzers, 145; and 155mm gun, 100.

¹⁰ By combat loading is meant the method of embarking troops and loading their equipment and supplies in such a manner that they can be rapidly unloaded at the objective in the desired priority for sustaining the attack,

landing plans, and control of the landing waves were ironed out. Lieutenant Colonel Robert G. Ballance, commanding the 1st Pioneer Battalion, was involved frequently in these conferences, for he was to be the division shore party commander.

By the time of STALEMATE II, the Marine Corps' amphibious techniques for an assault landing over a fringing reef had been battle-tested, modified where necessary, and molded into a smooth working ship-to-shore operation. Since previous Pacific campaigns had revealed that the LVT (Landing Vehicle, Tracked) was indispensable to the uninterrupted flow of assault troops past the coral barriers guarding the enemy's shores, every man in the assault forces at Peleliu was transported to the beach in an amphibian tractor.

These vehicles and their infantry passengers, as well as the LVT(A)s (armored amphibian tractors), were carried to the target by LSTs (Landing Ships, Tank). At a distance safe from enemy shore batteries, the LSTs opened their massive doors and disgorged the amphibians loaded with the assault Marines. The LVTs then proceeded to within roughly 4,000 yards of the beach. Here, along the line of departure, the vehicles were reformed into waves and headed in succession toward the beaches. Patrol craft and submarine chasers were stationed at this and other control lines to regulate movement. These vessels served also to facilitate communications between the various elements of this complex amphibious operation.

Upon reaching the reef, the amphibian tractors would crawl over and con-

tinue landward. At a point several hundred yards offshore, the LVT(A)s, which made up the initial assault wave, would begin firing their cannon for the last minute support of the assault troops in the following waves of LVTs. Once ashore, the Marines could get prompt artillery support from 75mm pack howitzers landed, ready for action, from the rear ramps on the most recent version of the LVT. Additional support was to be furnished by 105mm howitzers, brought onto the beach by DUKWs (2½-ton amphibious cargo trucks) which had been specially equipped with an A-frame unloading device to land the completely-assembled 105.

The division's tanks would be preloaded in LCTs (Landing Craft, Tank) which, in turn, were loaded unto the well decks of LSDs (Landing Ships, Dock). Once in the unloading zone, the decks of these floating drydocks were flooded with water. After the huge stern gates of the LSDs had swung open, the LCTs emerged for a run to the reef, where the tanks, specially waterproofed beforehand, debarked and continued ashore under their own power.

An innovation first tested at Peleliu was the use of LVTs to guide these tanks onto the beaches. Evolved to prevent delays and casualties such as those experienced during the Marianas campaign, this successful technique was described by a Marine tank officer in the following account:

An LVT was placed on each LCT to lead the tanks ashore. These LVTs were used to test the depth of the water, and as long as they propelled themselves along the bottom the tanks would follow, but if the

LVTs became waterborne the tanks would stop until the LVTs could reconnoiter a safe passage. . . . Fuel, ammunition and maintenance supplies were loaded on these LVTs which enabled the tank units to have a mobile supply dump available to them upon reaching the beach.¹¹

For the rest of the troops, equipment, and supplies, the passage to the target area was made in assault cargo and personnel transports. The Marines were moved from their transports to the line of departure by LCVPs (Landing Craft, Vehicle, Personnel), where they were formed into waves and dispatched to a transfer line just seaward of the coral. For the remainder of the trip to the beachhead, the troops and their equipment were transferred into empty LVTs and DUKWs which had returned from the beach to shuttle the rest of the Marines and their gear to shore.

Since the LVTs had a waterborne speed of about 4.5 miles per hour, the trip from the line of departure to the beach was estimated as 30 minutes and from the transfer line, 15 minutes. Preceding the first wave of troops and scheduled to hit the beaches at H-Hour were the armored amphibians. A minute later, the initial assault troops would land, with the following waves scheduled to land at five-minute intervals. Within the first 20 minutes, five assault battalions, comprising some 4,500 men, were to be on their assigned beaches, and tanks would begin landing over the edge of the reef. Four minutes later, the regimental weapons companies were to begin landing and, by H plus 85 minutes, with the coming ashore of

three more infantry battalions, there would be 8,000 combat Marines on the beachhead.

To follow, of course, would be the remaining 17,000 men of the reinforced division, their equipment, and the some 34,500 tons of initial supply support. The division logisticians planned to leave practically all the bulk cargo either in the cargo nets or on the pallets loaded on board the ships at the embarkation points in order to expedite unloading at the target.¹² When these pre-packaged loads made the trip from ship to the supply dump on land, they would be moved intact at each necessary transfer point by crane instead of being unloaded and reloaded, piece by piece, by manpower. If necessary, the pallets could be dumped on the edge of the reef and hauled to the beach by bulldozer. In all, the division utilized some 2,200 pallets, attempting to palletize a representative portion of the bulk cargo. As it turned out, however, the items found most suitable for palletizing were ammunition, barbed wire, and pickets.

In charge of all unloading activities to the seaward of the beaches was the transport group beachmaster. Under him were three transport division beachmasters, each responsible for the unloading in front of a regimental beach. Each of these beaches was assigned a reef beach party and a shore

¹¹ Capt George E. Jerue ltr to CMC, dtd 2Mar50, in *Peleliu Comment File*.

¹² The pallet, an Army innovation first used in the Marshalls, was simply a sled, four by six feet, with wooden runners, which could be loaded to a height of about three feet and with a weight of approximately 3,000 pounds, the load being fastened securely on the pallet by means of flat metal strappings.

beach party. The reef beach party was responsible for the amphibian vehicles and boats when afloat and had the task of marking approaches over the reef and points on it where craft unable to negotiate the coral barrier could be beached. The shore beach party became the naval platoon of the regimental shore party and, as such, performed its normal functions in connection with marking of the beaches, salvage, and evacuation.

As the division shore party commander at Peleliu, Lieutenant Colonel Ballance supervised the handling of supplies on and in the rear of the beaches, as well as the casualties arriving from the battalion aid stations. He had the further responsibility of providing for the close-in defenses of the beach areas.

Initially, the division shore party was to be decentralized with a detachment of the subordinate regimental shore party going in with each assault battalion. Each regiment had been furnished a company of pioneers from Lieutenant Colonel Ballance's 1st Pioneer Battalion as the framework for its shore party.

As soon as possible, the regimental shore party commander was to take over and consolidate the unloading operations on his beach. In turn, Lieutenant Colonel Ballance, upon landing, was to assume control of all shore party activities and to select the best beaches over which supplies would continue to be unloaded. To insure that the vital stream of supplies continued to flow into the supply dumps on the beaches, the colonel planned to maintain the closest of coordination with the various beach parties.

Later, when all assault shipping was ashore, the beach dumps were to be taken over by the 16th Field Depot, a Marine supply agency designated as part of the Island Command but attached to the 1st Marine Division for the assault phase. This innovation worked extremely well from the Marines' standpoint, for it made the field depot subject to the direct orders of the division's commanding general. According to the commanding officer of the 1st Service Battalion, this arrangement made all "the difference between ordering and asking."¹³

Another technique, first improvised during the Marianas campaign, was included in the original plans for the Peleliu assault. Two provisional companies of infantry replacements were attached to the shore party, until such time as they would be needed to fill depleted ranks in the rifle regiments. The shore party could make good use of these extra men during the critical unloading phase, and they would be readily available for deployment as riflemen on the front lines when needed. The heavy losses of the 1st Marines during the first week of the Peleliu campaign accentuated the wisdom of planning for combat replacements and, in the later Iwo Jima operation, each Marine division had two replacement drafts attached to its shore party.

Logistic support on D-Day was expected to be hectic and difficult. The assault battalions would be able to take in with them only limited quantities of

¹³ Col John Kaluf ltr to CMC, dtd 7Mar50, in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Kaluf ltr*,

rations, water, and ammunition, and the anticipated heavy fighting would make it particularly important to assure an adequate resupply of ammunition and water. To safeguard this vital flow of supplies reaching the embattled Marines ashore, certain improvisations were made and precautions taken by the logistic planners.

Until such time as a pontoon causeway could be constructed over the reef to the Peleliu beaches, the creation of an artificial, waterborne supply beach seaward of the reef was imperative. For this purpose, 24 pontoon barges were lashed to the sides of LSTs for the journey from the Solomons to the target. These barges had been formed by fastening pontoon cells, seven cells long and three wide, into a single unit. When an outboard motor was attached, they became self-propelled. Once in the unloading area, only the lines holding the barges to the sides of the LSTs had to be loosened and the barges would be launched into the water, ready to proceed under their own power.

Nine of these barges, which had been modified to allow the mounting of cranes on them, would be dropped into the sea early on D-Day. After having swing cranes lowered onto them and secured, the barges would proceed to a point approximately 1,000 yards seaward of the reef. Their job was to facilitate the transfer of bulk supplies from the boats bringing them from the cargo ships to the amphibians for transportation across the reef and onto the beach. If shore-based enemy fire proved too dangerous, the barges could move under their own power to a safer spot farther out.

Three other barges were to provide fuel and lubricating oil for the LVTs. After being launched from the LSTs, these self-propelled barges were to be loaded with 80-octane gasoline and lubricating oil and dispatched to a point just off the reef. One was assigned to each regimental beach, and they all were ordered to erect a large banner, marked "Gas," so that the LVTs could easily recognize them.

The remaining 12 barges would be used to establish floating dumps. Since the transports and cargo ships were expected to retire to safer waters out to sea at nightfall, provision had to be made for an accessible supply of critical items which would be needed by the assault battalions during the hours of darkness. Upon being launched, these barges would proceed to designated cargo ships, where they would take on predetermined loads of infantry and tank ammunition, flamethrower fuel, motor fuel, lubricants, emergency rations, and water in drums, before continuing on to report to their assigned transport division beachmasters for mooring off the reef. Large painted numbers on the sides of the barges would aid the drivers of the LVTs and DUKWs in identifying the type of load contained in each. The amphibians could come alongside the barge and load by hand, or the barge might be placed next to a crane for speedier loading.

The problem of how to insure an immediately accessible supply of high expenditure rate items, such as mortar and machine gun ammunition and flamethrower fuel, for the assaulting troops during the afternoon of D-Day was also resolved. At Peleliu, the amphibian

cargo trailer would be utilized in quantity for the first time. This Marine-designed vehicle had an axle and two pneumatic tires on the bottom while its top could be bolted into place, making it waterproof. Pre-loaded in the Russells, the trailers could be lowered into the sea by cranes at the transport area and towed by LCVPs to the reef, where amphibians would hook onto them, drag them across the jagged coral barrier, and finish towing them the rest of the way to the beach. Each rifle regiment was allotted 13 of these trailers and the artillery regiment 20.

Another method of handling priority cargo was by means of specially loaded LCVPs. Certain of the assault ships would set aside eight LCVPs, preloaded with infantry ammunition, flame-thrower fuel, and water. On D-Day, these LCVPs would be dispatched to the reef off their assigned regimental beaches. The respective regimental shore parties would be briefed on the contents of the different type loads and could send out LVTs or DUKWs to locate the correct LCVP and take on a load. In a similar manner, LCMs (Landing Craft, Mechanized) were to be loaded with artillery ammunition in order to meet urgent requests for resupply of the Marine batteries ashore.

Since Peleliu lacked surface water and its enervating climate would accelerate consumption, preparations were made to insure an adequate supply for the attacking infantrymen. Every available 5-gallon can was pre-filled to the brim and scheduled for an early trip to shore, while scoured-out 55-gallon oil drums would hold a reserve supply. After the engineers managed to

set up distillation apparatus and drill new wells, the water problem was expected to vanish.

Throughout the logistic planning for STALEMATE II, the short supply of shipping in the Pacific was always a limiting factor. An unfortunate example of this situation was the fact that only four LSDs were available and these were equally divided by IIIAC planners between the Peleliu and Angaur assault units. The division found itself able to lift only 30 tanks and had to leave 16 behind. This decision aroused criticism, for Peleliu was more heavily defended and more suitable for tank operations than Angaur, where, as it turned out, only one company of tanks was ever employed at one time. As the commanding officer of the 1st Tank Battalion later stated:

... it is my belief that a serious error, indefensible from the tank viewpoint, was made in splitting the available tank shipping ... as events proved it was extremely unsound in view of the desperate need for additional tanks throughout the first five (5) days of the operation ... our Corps staff at that time did not include a tank section, greatly handicapping tank planning at Corps level.¹⁴

The lack of shipping space, coupled with the planners' belief that Peleliu's limited land area would not cause a serious transportation problem, resulted in the breaking up of the 1st Motor Transport Battalion as an integral unit. Only Company A was allowed to lift its organic equipment, including repair facilities, and, even

¹⁴ LtCol Arthur J. Stuart ltr to CMC, dtd 25Apr50, in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Stuart ltr*.

then, its platoons were distributed among the infantry regiments to expedite the movement of supplies from the beach to the forward areas during the initial advance inland. Company C was detached during the operation and its men utilized as amphibian tractor drivers, and Headquarters and Service Company was assigned the responsibility for the division's maintenance and fuel supply, while Marines of Company B were to serve as stretcher bearers, relief drivers, and reserve troops throughout the campaign. Since each individual unit of the division down to company level was allowed to lift up to five vehicles, depending upon its mission, the total number of trucks carried to the target approximated the number that would have been organic to the 1st Motor Transport Battalion, but the lack of centralized control proved far from satisfactory. In the battalion commander's view:

This proved to be a serious handicap in the direct supply of troops. With few exceptions, there were no trucks available for the movement of troops even though the tactical situation of then [during the Peleliu campaign] called for the expeditious movement of troops by vehicular transportation.¹⁵

PAVUVU, TROOP TRAINING, AND SHORTAGES¹⁶

Following the Cape Gloucester campaign in the debilitating rain forests

¹⁵ Maj Robert B. McBroom ltr to CMC, dtd 13Mar50, in *Peleliu Comment File*.

¹⁶ Additional sources used for this section are: History of the 1st Marine Regiment, 26Aug-10Oct44, n.d., hereafter *1st Mar Hist*; LtCol Kimber H. Boyer, USMC, "Formation and Employment of an Armored Amphibian

of New Britain, the Marines of the 1st Division were badly in need of rest and rehabilitation. A suitable camp was already available on Guadalcanal but, instead, General Geiger chose the small island of Pavuvu, in hopes of sparing his exhausted men the distasteful task of furnishing large working parties each day to the Island Command as was customary on the larger island. He had made the selection following a reconnaissance of Pavuvu by air and with the expectation that a battalion of Seabees would be there preparing facilities.

Upon the Marines' arrival in April 1944, they discovered to their dismay that the 10-mile long piece of coral was virtually a jungle, with the abandoned plantation long overgrown and rats and rotting coconuts practically everywhere. The 15th Naval Construction Battalion, having completed a 1,300 bed hospital on nearby Banika Island on 26 March, had little time to work on the camp on Pavuvu before the Marines arrived. Typical of the Marines' bitterness was that of the officer who barged into General Smith's tent and shouted, "Great God! Who picked this dump? More like a hog lot than a rest camp."¹⁷

Instead of getting a chance to relax, the battle-weary Marines found them-

Battalion, Palau Operation, 15 September 1944-20 October 1944: A Study of the Use of Special Equipment," (Quantico, Va.: Marine Corps Schools, Amphibious Warfare School, Senior Course 1946-1947), hereafter Boyer, *Armd AmphibianBn*; Condit, Diamond, and Turnblad, *Marine Corps Ground Training*.

¹⁷ Burke Davis, *Marine! The Life of LtGen Lewis B. (Chesty) Puller, USMC (Ret)*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1962), p. 202, hereafter Davis, *Marine!*, used with permission.

selves turned to constructing a livable camp area. Disposing of the rotting coconuts alone took over a month; wells for drinking water had to be dug;¹⁸ and for weeks, the men were forced to live, work, and sleep in mud until they had laboriously bucket-hauled enough coral to surface the access roads and living area.

Not surprisingly, the morale of the division hit an all-time low. The majority of the veterans had been in the Pacific for over two years, and their exertions in two strenuous jungle campaigns had sapped their reserves of energy. Alternately racked by malarial chills or burning up with its fever—which the tropical climate of Pavuvu did nothing to alleviate—weakened by poor rations, and rotten with a variety of fungus growths in various parts of their bodies, these Marines were both physically and mentally exhausted.

The number answering sick call increased alarmingly, averaging "200 to 250 cases daily. . . . Hospitalization would not have been required in many of these cases had water, clean surroundings and clean clothing and of course good food been available to all units on the Island."¹⁹ Because of the

Marines' weakened condition, their let-down following the recent tensions and stresses of combat, and the countless frustrations encountered on Pavuvu, they tended to behave in a manner that people back home might consider eccentric and to give credulity to wild rumors that ordinarily would have been laughed down.²⁰

Adding to their woes, the food on Pavuvu, while adequate, was monotonous, unappetizing, and limited—for example, fresh meat appeared on the mess tables only once a week—the movies were usually second-run features or worse, and beer was limited to only a few cans a week.²¹ Contributing to the men's dissatisfaction with their lot was the widespread belief that service troops on Banika and Guadalcanal were eating and drinking much better than the combat-returned Marines.

Welding these dispirited, malady-ridden, and exhausted men once again into a keenly-edged fighting team was the first task faced by the division's officers, who set about immediately preparing the Marines physically and

¹⁸ ". . . and when that water was reached, it was the most god-awful stuff you can imagine. Its unique flavor was not enhanced by the rotting coconuts which had seeped through the coral-streaked mud to the water supply and one was forced to spike it with the lemonade component of K-rations which, in itself, was more like battery acid and more suitable for burnishing canteen cups and mess gear than for drinking." Mr. Benis M. Frank comments on draft MS, dtd 29Mar63.

¹⁹ Cdr Emil E. Napp ltr to CMC, dtd 9Mar50, in *Peleliu Comment File*.

²⁰ "Less eccentric by Pavuvu standards was the man who ran out of his tent at dusk and began to pound his fists against a coconut tree, sobbing angrily: 'I hate you, goddammit, I hate you!' 'Hit it once for me,' came a cry from a nearby tent, the only comment that was made then or later by the man's buddies." McMillan, *The Old Breed*, p. 231.

²¹ "The only USO show to reach this miserable hole was not scheduled to come at all; it arrived only by dint of the personal efforts of Bob Hope and at considerable inconvenience to his troupe, who managed to sandwich in a morning performance between rear echelon engagements shortly before the division shoved off for Peleliu." Hough, *Assault on Peleliu*, p. 27.

psychologically for their role in the forthcoming assault. Training, however, had to be conducted under the severe limitations of space, equipment shortages, and the detailing of men and equipment for the construction of camp facilities. In addition, the division experienced an influx of some 260 officers and 4,600 enlisted men replacing those Marines being rotated home. All of the newcomers had to be broken in on their new jobs for the imminent battle.

The amount of terrain on Pavuvu suitable for training purposes proved to be small even for a platoon to maneuver about, let alone a whole division. As a result, Marines on field problems found themselves slipping between the tents and messhalls of their bivouac area.²² With large-scale maneuvers out of the question, the only recourse was to place a much greater emphasis upon small unit exercises, practicing with rifles, automatic weapons, grenades, bazookas, and portable flamethrowers. Meticulous attention was paid to the details of each unit's proposed scheme of maneuver ashore at the target. Over and over again, the movements of the scheme were rehearsed until each rifleman, specialist, and leader knew exactly where he was to be and what he was to do throughout the different phases of the assault.

²² One story, perhaps apocryphal, has it that "one Saturday morning a battalion of the Fifth Marines was holding inspection while a battalion of the First Marines was conducting a field problem. The result was that during the inspection, fire groups of the latter were infiltrating through the statue-like ranks of the former." Maj Robert W. Burnette ltr to CMC, dtd 9Mar49, in *Peleliu Comment File*.

Stressed also was instruction in close-in fighting with the bayonet, knife, club, hip-level snap shooting, and judo. The use of hikes, excellent in hardening men for the rigors of combat, was handicapped by the lack of space; the marching units kept bumping into each other.

Unfortunately, practical experience in tank/infantry coordination, destined to be of inestimable value in the coming battle, was limited to one day for each rifle regiment. Each squad, however, did actually coach the movements and firing of a tank by visual signals and the external telephone in the rear of the tank.

Wherever suitable terrain could be found, firing ranges and combat areas were set up, and their use was rigidly controlled by a tight scheduling. In the combat areas, platoon-sized groups employed flamethrowers, bazookas, demolitions, antitank guns, machine guns, and rifles while practicing simulated assaults against log bunkers. On the infiltration course, Marines negotiated barbed wire and other obstacles, while live ammunition forced them to keep down. Other subjects covered were the techniques of night defense, chemical warfare, patrolling with war dogs, and coordination of fire teams using all organic weapons. The ground phase of the training closed in the middle of August with combat firing by all units.

Even more difficult and nightmarish than the infantry's efforts were the attempts of the division's supporting arms to train with their bulkier equipment on Pavuvu. The 11th Marines rehearsed massing fires with time, impact, and ricochet bursts, but due to lack of space,

the artillery "was reduced to the pitiful expedient of firing into the water with the observers out in a boat or DUKW."²³ Without room to maneuver, tank training had to stress gunnery, flamethrower operations, fording, night security, all-around defense, and textbook study of tactics. On the whole, organic support units spent the majority of their training period breaking in replacements, repairing battered equipment, and shaking down new vehicles.

During the division's training period, two newly developed weapons were received. The Navy Mark I flamethrower was capable of throwing a flame of blazing napalm²⁴ to a distance of 150 yards and sustaining it for 80 seconds. Three of the flamethrowers were mounted on LVTs, while another LVT was equipped to serve as a supply carrier for the napalm mixture. Although slated for employment primarily against beach pillboxes during the assault landings, the new weapon was to prove its great value in reducing dug-in fortifications farther inland.

The other new weapon was the 60mm shoulder mortar, adapted to fire from a light machine gun mount and designed for flat trajectory fire against pillbox and cave openings. Some of its parts, however, proved too weak to stand the rough wear and tear of combat, and Marines who had to lug the weapon around complained of its heaviness. Even more serious was the recoil, which

was so severe that the gunner had to be relieved after firing only two to four rounds. Since this new weapon's function duplicated that of the bazooka, which gave a good performance on coral-surfaced Peleliu, Marines were inclined to hold the shoulder mortar in less regard than the older and more familiar weapon.

Hindering the whole training schedule of the division, but especially the amphibious phases, were critical shortages of equipment. These embraced such a wide array of items that about the only things in adequate supply were the basic arms of the individual infantrymen. Shortages in armored amphibians, amphibian tractors, flamethrowers, demolitions, automatic weapons, bazookas, engineering equipment, and waterproofing material existed right up to the last stages of training, while final allotments in some categories arrived barely in time to be combat-loaded with the troops. In addition, some of the supplies furnished with the division were not of A-1 quality:

Belts of machine gun ammunition had rotted . . . powder rings on mortar ammunition were disintegrating and bourrelets rusted, shotgun shells swollen or, if brass, corroded. All ammunition had to be unstowed, inspected and in large part replaced and restowed at the last minute.²⁵

To complicate matters further, the division had been ordered early in July to form two provisional amphibian tractor battalions, "utilizing personnel of the 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion, augmented by personnel from units of the

²³ LtCol Leonard F. Chapman, Jr., ltr to CMC, dtd 9Mar50, in *Peleliu Comment File*.

²⁴ The gelled fuel resulting from combining napalm powder with gasoline for use in incendiary bombs and flamethrowers.

²⁵ LtCol Spencer S. Berger ltr to CMC, dtd 19Mar50, in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Berger ltr*.

division.”²⁶ These Marine elements preparing for imminent combat, however, objected strenuously to parting with any of their skilled men, and often did not without a fight. In addition, those Marines reassigned to the amphibian tractor battalions had to be retrained in the operation of the unfamiliar equipment. Often, due to lack of time to practice, these inexperienced drivers would be performing on-the-job training with tractors filled with Marines practicing assault landings.

Further complications arose for the newly formed 3d Armored Amphibian Battalion (Provisional), because it was scheduled to receive the recently developed LVT(A), or armored amphibian tractor, which would form the initial assault wave at Peleliu and furnish fire support for the following troop waves. Lacking any of the new vehicles for demonstration purposes, the battalion's Marines, completely unfamiliar with the LVT(A) or its armament, were forced to rely solely upon blueprints for acquaintance with the tractor they would be handling in combat. Although the first delivery of the armored amphibians arrived early in August, difficulties still persisted. After feverishly practicing with the new vehicles, the crews were dumbfounded to find that the next shipments were of a later model, mounting 75mm howitzers instead of the 37mm's with which the crews had previously familiarized themselves. Approximately two-thirds of the battalion had to be retrained as a result.

“That the battalion should turn in an outstanding performance after such un-

propitious beginnings might well rank as one of the minor miracles of the campaign.”²⁷ The man responsible for the battalion's good showing on the Peleliu beaches was Lieutenant Colonel Kimber H. Boyer. He “did one of the greatest training jobs I ever saw or heard of,”²⁸ said a fellow officer. Although beset by overwhelming problems and forced to obtain his men in dribbles from whatever source he could find, Lieutenant Colonel Boyer managed to train and shape his crews into a finely tuned combat team by the time of the assault. The commanding officer of the newly formed 6th Amphibian Tractor Battalion, Captain John I. Fitzgerald, Jr., “faced with almost the same problems and circumstances [as Boyer], performed as admirably.”²⁹

The amphibious training, not only of the amphibian battalions but also of the entire division, was retarded seriously by the insufficiency of amphibious vehicles and the lack of repair parts for them. Upon its arrival at Pavuvu, the division had only 48 of the 248 LVTs authorized for the Peleliu campaign. Of these 48, more than half were inoperative, awaiting vital parts. When the first shipment did arrive, there remained less than a month in which to prepare the vehicles, train the crews, and familiarize the several thousand assault troops in LVT ship-to-shore techniques.

As a result, the division was forced to substitute the DUKWs as personnel carriers and to use them in the amphib-

²⁷ Hough, *Assault on Peleliu*, p. 31.

²⁸ LtCol Joseph E. Buckley ltr to CMC, dtd 10Mar50, in *Peleliu Comment File*.

²⁹ Maj Robert F. Reutlinger ltr to CMC, dtd 10Mar50, in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Reutlinger ltr*.

²⁶ 1st MarDiv SAR, Phase I, p. 5.

ious exercises with the infantry regiments. It was during such a landing drill that General Rupertus fell from an amphibian tractor and severely fractured his ankle, an injury that might have caused a less determined man to miss the Peleliu campaign. The amphibious trucks used by the infantry, however, had to be taken away from the artillery units, which had been practicing their own assault techniques of loading and unloading howitzers and radio jeeps in the LVTs and DUKWs. Consequently, the training time available to the 11th Marines was drastically reduced.

Training for the 1st Marine Division culminated in large-scale landing rehearsals at the Cape Esperance area on Guadalcanal. By this time, 27 and 29 August, the assault units were already embarked on board the vessels which would carry them to the target, and the warships scheduled to provide naval gunfire support for the operation were also on hand.

The first rehearsal was designed solely to test communications. After the new radio equipment, which had been rushed by air from Pearl Harbor to supply the division's minimum requirements, was accurately calibrated, the rehearsal went off smoothly. On the 29th, the naval guns and planes blasted at the beaches prior to the landing and continued deep supporting fires after the Marines debarked and moved inland. Spreading out, the assault units went through the motions of their assigned missions, and everything went off smoothly.

At a critique held the next day, and attended by all of the ranking commanders of both naval and ground

forces, not a single serious criticism was raised; in fact, nothing in the way of constructive revisions was even discussed. The two practice landings, however, had served their purpose of familiarizing the troops with their debarkation and transfer stations, snapping in the new crews of the amphibian vehicles, coordinating the preliminary gunfire and bombardment plans, and ironing out any possible kinks in the complicated ship-to-shore maneuver, which depended upon split-second timing and scheduling for success.

On 3 September, a shore party exercise was held at Tetere Beach on Guadalcanal, but no supplies were unloaded. The next landing performed by Marines of the division would be over Peleliu's coral reef and onto the enemy-held beaches.

Despite its frustrations with Pavuvu's shortcomings, the equipment shortages, and the training difficulties, the 1st Marine Division had done an admirable job of fusing the new replacements with the older veterans of Guadalcanal and Cape Gloucester into a recharged, combat-ready fighting unit. When the 1st Division's Marines stormed ashore at Peleliu, they were once again a top-notch assault outfit.

*MOUNTING THE ATTACK*³⁰

The logistical problem confronting the 1st Marine Division in mounting out from Pavuvu for the Peleliu campaign and the many heartbreaking diffi-

³⁰ Additional sources used for this section are: TF 32 MovO No. A503-44, dtd 20Aug44; ComLSTFlot 13 Trng MovO No. 3-44, dtd 24Aug44; 1st MarDiv AdminO No. 1-44, dtd 7Aug44.

culties encountered in solving it cannot be overemphasized. What the situation would have been if the division had not been lifted by an experienced transport group is hard to imagine, because the loading of the naval vessels had to be closely coordinated with the final plans for the beach assault.

Fortunately, the transport group commander, his staff, and the vessels' crews were veterans in complicated ship-to-shore movements and experts in working with Marines to solve related problems. The group staff, according to one Marine officer:

... worked in the closest liaison, not only with the Division's Operations and Planning Officers, but with the commanders and staff officers of subordinate units, together with the Navy Control Officers designated for each beach. The consolidated scheme was a product of close and effective joint planning.³¹

The embarkation warning order reached the Marine division on 5 August, only 10 days before the actual assault loading was to begin. Planning by staff officers started immediately but, without any idea of the number, type, or characteristics of the allotted ships, only the most general plans could be made. Although the transport group commander and his staff arrived at Pavuvu on 10 August, the necessary, detailed information was not obtained until two days later. Even after the ships finally appeared, it was discovered that several had reserved holds for ship's stores or carried extra equipment which was not shown on the ship's char-

acteristics. As a result, confusion and misunderstanding marked the loading arrangements of the division, causing numerous changes, compromises, and improvisations right up until the last.

To complicate the Marines' logistic problem even further, loading operations would have to be conducted at the widely separated staging areas of Pavuvu, Banika, Guadalcanal, and Tulagi, as well as in the New Hebrides, where the transports would pick up the ground echelons and equipment of the Marine air units slated to be based on the Peleliu airfield as soon as it was seized and operative. If the principle of combat loading was to be adhered to, a prodigious amount of load planning and close coordination of ships' routes would be necessary to prevent wasted effort or back-tracking. Compounding the difficulties were the limits to dockage and lighterage at certain of these staging areas, which necessitated a tight scheduling of the ships' movements to forestall any needless delays.

The first units of the LST flotilla assembled from scattered Pacific bases, arrived off Pavuvu on 11 August, and the Marine division began loading the next day. Since the flotilla commander, Captain Armand Robertson, had been too busy readying his ships for sea to come to Pavuvu during the planning phase, the Marines had requested him to delegate a liaison officer with the authority to make decisions in his name, but none was ever furnished. Admiral Fort, who was Captain Robertson's superior, held daily conferences with the Marines on Pavuvu after 8 August, thus to some extent offsetting the gap created by the absence of a liaison officer,

³¹ Col Harold O. Deakin ltr to CMC, dtd 10Mar50, in *Peleliu Comment File*.

Nevertheless, shortly after his arrival, Captain Robertson ordered the loading plans for eight LSTs to be changed. The Marines knew from past experience that understowing²³ was indispensable in keeping within allotted load limits and yet lifting all the required tonnage. It was only with the greatest reluctance, however, that the flotilla commander permitted his LSTs to be so loaded.

Even after the Marines were finally embarked, they discovered to their amazement that certain vessels transporting two regiments would be in launching areas different from those planned by the division. If not rectified, this drastic change would force the amphibians and craft, carrying the 5th and 7th Marines ashore, to crisscross in order to get these regiments to the proper beaches. Such a maneuver, difficult to execute and contrary to the accepted doctrine for ship-to-shore procedures, could not be tolerated and, as a result, troops already embarked on board nine vessels had to be shifted.

Actually, the last of the LST flotilla did not put in an appearance at Pavuvu until 25 August, at which time the troops were already embarked on board the transports in preparation for their final training rehearsals. In spite of all these last-minute complications, however, the 30 LSTs, 17 transports, and 2 LSDs allotted to the division for the Peleliu operation were fully combat-loaded by 31 August.

After their final landing exercises at Guadalcanal, the Marines had a chance to go ashore before departing for the Peleliu assault. These last few days were spent in conditioning hikes, small-unit maneuvers, and recreation. The other assault unit of the IIIAC, the 81st Infantry Division, meanwhile, had mounted out in Hawaii and rendezvoused off Guadalcanal for its final rehearsals and movement to the target.

Unlike the Marine division with its two major campaigns under its belt, the newly activated Army division was still untested in battle. Neither during their training nor mounting out had the soldiers endured any of the difficulties experienced by the Marines on Pavuvu. According to the 81st's history, "the loading worked out well," and after "its long stateside training, its intensive refresher courses, the rehearsal, and the relaxation in the [Hawaiian] Islands, the Division was a bronzed, tough crew, ready for action."³³

On 4 September, LSTs carrying the initial assault elements of both the 1st Division and the 81st lifted anchor and departed with their naval escort ships for the Palaus. Four days later, the faster-moving transports and LSDs followed with their screening forces. The two convoys were expected to rendezvous in the target area early on D-Day. Prior to the departure of the transport echelon, the Peleliu Fire Support Unit and Escort Carrier Group had left in order to arrive at the target on 12 September to begin the bombardment and bombing of the objective, as well as to

²³ Understowing consisted simply of the loading of the tank deck of an LST with flat or well-packaged cargo, such as rations, barbed wire, or ammunition, next covering the whole with a layer of dunnage, and then storing LVTs on top of the dunnage.

³³ Historical Committee, *81st Infantry Division*, pp. 45, 59.

start the underwater demolition of artificial obstacles.

The approach route lay northwestward through the Solomons and then along a course generally parallel to the northern coast of New Guinea. For the embarked troops, the 2,100-mile trip over smooth seas was uneventful, the monotony being broken only by the periodic anti-aircraft exercises which used the naval planes flying from the escort carriers as tracking targets. On 14 September, D minus 1, the transports made contact with the slower-moving LSTs, and they proceeded together to their respective stations off the Palaus.

On the same day, the Marine troop commanders and the civilian news correspondents opened General Rupertus' sealed letter, which had been given to each of them just prior to the departure from Guadalcanal with instructions not to open it until D minus 1. Apparently, the division's commanding general had not consulted with anyone, "with the possible exception of"³⁴ his chief of staff, before issuing the letter. In it, Rupertus expressed his opinion that the fighting on Peleliu would be extremely tough but short, lasting not more than four days. This viewpoint, according to the official Marine Corps monograph on the campaign was:

... perhaps the most striking manifestation of that preoccupation with speedy conquest at the highest division level which was to color tactical thinking ashore for a month to follow.³⁵

³⁴ LtCol William E. Benedict ltr to CMC, dtd 27Feb50, in *Peleliu Comment File*.

³⁵ Hough, *Assault on Peleliu*, p. 35. "Most officers believed this unusual document [was] intended in the nature of a pep talk. This was

MARINE AIR PREPARES³⁶

Since the Western Carolines lay too far distant from any Allied base for land-based aircraft to provide cover during STALEMATE II, naval planes operating off carriers would furnish the needed air support until such time as the airfield on Peleliu had been captured and readied for use by American aviation units. Destined to be the major component of this garrison air force was the 2d Marine Aircraft Wing (2d MAW) which, in mid-1944, was located in the Solomons and functioned primar-

not its effect on news correspondents, however: many of the 36 accredited to the division did not come ashore at all, and only six (one of whom was killed) chose to stay through the critical early phases. Hence, news coverage of the operation was sketchy, often misleading, and, when quick conquest failed to materialize, tinged with biting criticism." *Ibid*.

³⁶ Additional sources used for this section are: Garrison AF Western Carolines WarDs, 30May-Sep44, n.d., hereafter *Garrison AF WarD*, with appropriate date; Island Comd, Peleliu WarDs, Jul-Sep44, hereafter *Peleliu Island Comd WarD*, with appropriate date; 2d MAW WarDs, June-Sep44, hereafter *2d MAW WarD*, with appropriate date; 2d MAW UHist, 7Dec41-20Feb46, dtd 12Mar46, hereafter *2d MAW UHist*; HqSq-2, 2d MAW WarD, Jul-Sep44, hereafter *HqSq-2, 2d MAW WarD*, with appropriate date; MAG-11 WarD, Jun-Sep44, hereafter *MAG-11 WarD*, with appropriate date; MAG-11 UHist, 1Aug41-1Jul44, dtd 19Jun45, hereafter *MAG-11 UHist*; MAG-11 Rpt on Palau Ops with 4th MAW comments, dtd 22Dec44, hereafter *MAG-11 Palau Rpt*; VMF-114 WarD, Jun-Sep44, hereafter *VMF-114 WarD*, with appropriate date; VMF-114 UHist, 1Jul43-1Jan45, dtd 10May45, hereafter *VMF-114 UHist*; VMF(N)-541 WarD, Jun-Sep44, hereafter *VMF(N)-541 WarD*, with appropriate date; VMF(N)-541 UHist, 15Feb44-30Apr46, dtd 30Apr46, hereafter *VMF(N)-541 UHist*.

ily as a training command for squadrons flying combat missions in more active zones. Assignment to the wing, whose headquarters was on Efate Island in the New Hebrides, meant that a squadron's pilots could receive additional training as well as enjoy a welcome break from the rigors of daily flights over enemy-held territory, before returning to combat.

The 2d Wing first suspected it was slated for a more active war role when it received a dispatch on 14 June ordering it to become an "independent and self sustaining unit"³⁷ as rapidly as possible. Eleven days later, the wing was directed to move to Espiritu Santo Island, a staging area farther north in the same island chain, for possible deployment to an active combat zone.

A forward echelon moved to the new base to pave the way for the rest of the command, and the 2d MAW officially began operating from there on 3 July. During the remainder of the month, the wing busied itself with completing the move, bringing itself up to authorized strength, gathering and readying its own lower echelons, and streamlining its staff organization for efficient functioning under any possible combat contingency.

This tailoring of the air unit to fit the requirement of its assigned mission resulted in the 2d MAW reverting back to a one-group wing. Only the month previously, it had been brought up to a two-group wing in anticipation of an active combat role. Since Marine Aircraft Group 11 (MAG-11) was expected to furnish sufficient tactical air support

for STALEMATE II once it was based on the captured and repaired Peleliu airfield, the unneeded MAG-25 was detached from the 2d MAW on 25 July.³⁸

In preparation for basing on Peleliu, MAG-11 was authorized a new provisional table of organization on 26 July. All elements, except group and squadron headquarters, and operations and intelligence sections, were to be transferred to the service squadron, which would then be placed under the operational control of the Air Base Commander, a subordinate of the Island Commander. Although these changes made the service squadron large and unwieldy, besides complicating the command structure, this arrangement was to remain in effect throughout the Palau campaign.

Earlier, on 6 July, the 2d MAW had lost its commander, when CinCPOA summoned Brigadier General Harold D. Campbell to Pearl Harbor to organize a headquarters for his forthcoming role as Island Commander, Peleliu. This joint Army-Navy-Marine Corps command, known as the Third Island Base Headquarters until 16 November 1944, was to have the mission of defending the captured base from all possible enemy attacks and improving the island's facilities in accordance with the base development plan.

No sooner had the new wing commander, Major General James T. Moore, assumed command, than a dispatch from Admiral Nimitz on 9 July desig-

³⁷ *2d MAW WarD*, Jun44, p. 1.

³⁸ The 2d MAW became a two-group wing again on 8 October 1944, the date that Marine Base Defense Air Group 45 (redesignated MAG-45 on 15 November) arrived at Ulithi Atoll.

nated the Marine officer as Commander Garrison Air Force, Western Carolines. As was common in the intricate amphibious air-sea-land operations of the Pacific War, General Moore was to head a staff composed of Army, Navy, and Marine Corps officers whose mission was to "defend the Western Carolines area by employing in mutual support against hostile air threats all air defense units based in that area."³⁹ Once his squadrons began operating from the captured Peleliu airfield, the Marine general would have three major tasks: defending all ground troops and convoys in the Western Carolines from enemy air attacks, providing close air support for the infantry units still fighting on Peleliu, and neutralizing the remaining enemy bases in the Western Carolines.

Although still the 2d Wing's commander, General Moore found it necessary to locate at Pearl Harbor near the headquarters of Marine Aircraft Wings, Pacific, because the planning and organizing of his new command necessitated frequent conferences with the staffs of higher and subordinate echelons. Finally, on 22 August, the Marine general flew to Espiritu Santo and assumed personal command of the wing during final preparations for the Peleliu campaign.

Scheduled to land with the assault units at Peleliu were the ground echelons of Marine Fighter Squadron 114 (VMF-114), VMF-121, VMF-122, and Marine Night Fighter Squadron 541 (VMF(N)-541) of MAG-11. Their flight echelons were to remain at Es-

piritu until such time as they could be flown by stages to the repaired and operative airfield. As soon as possible, other units of MAG-11 would be flown in, to be followed later by wing headquarters.

With combat imminent, the group's squadrons underwent intensified training.⁴⁰ The typical day's flight schedule was designed to improve the skills and abilities of the pilots, as well as to determine the condition of the aircraft and equipment. The final weeks prior to mounting out found the fighter squadrons stressing dive and glide bombing exercises, for which their assigned aircraft, the F4U (Corsair), was admirably suited. In addition to this increased emphasis upon tactics which could be used in close support of ground troops, the basics of squadron air work were practiced in instruments, intercepts, and division tactics.

The Marine air units, not unlike the ground troops, were experiencing their own difficulties with shortages, as MAG-11 reported:

The first major difficulty encountered was in obtaining the proper quantities and types of aviation ordnance. Allowances were specifically laid down by ComAirPac [Commander Air Forces, Pacific Fleet] who then made ComSoPac [Commander, South Pacific] responsible for their delivery. ComSoPac passed this task to the 16th Field Depot, a Marine unit, at Guadalcanal. Due to shortages, lack of knowledge of aviation ordnance and lack of belting equipment, the specified allowances were never obtained. The Group went on the operation short of certain bombs, fuses,

³⁹ *Garrison AF WarD*, 30May-30Sep44, p. 3.

⁴⁰ During July and August, training accidents resulted in 2 pilots killed, 1 missing, 1 wounded, and 4 aircraft lost.

etc., and had to take all unbelted ammunition. Belting and handling a million and a quarter rounds of .50 caliber ammunition was done after landing and proved to be a major problem.⁴¹

Since the Peleliu landing would be the first time that ground echelons of Marine squadrons would accompany the assault troops ashore, the aviators preparing for their role in STALEMATE II found themselves confronted by some unique problems. The question of the composition of the parties to accompany the general assault units and the amount and type of gear the parties should take with them was a difficult one to resolve, according to MAG-11, which noted:

At present, there is no table of allowances which prescribes the kind and amount of aviation materiel, Marine Corps equipment, transportation and personnel that should be taken in with the assault echelons. As a result of this, every Group and Squadron Commander had to make his own decision in the matter, with the result that the amount and kind of material and number of personnel taken in during the early stages of an operation varies greatly.⁴²

Adding to the Marine aviators' woes was the fact that, because shipping space was at a premium, equipment had to be reduced to the barest necessities. Liaison officers had been sent to Pavuvu for coordination of loading plans with the 1st Marine Division, but the limitation of pace on the ships transporting the assault elements and the staging of STALEMATE II at five widely separated points complicated the situation. The S. S. *Mormacport*, for example, af-

ter loading the ground echelons and equipment of MAG-11 and Marine Torpedo Bombing Squadron 134 (VMTB-134) in the New Hebrides, would stop at the Russells and embark another task force unit "on top of the Group and squadron gear."⁴³ As a result, VMTB-134 would be flying antisubmarine patrols long before its equipment or spare parts were ashore at Peleliu.

The newly organized VMF(N)-541, which arrived at the Espiritu Santo staging area from the United States just in time for its ground echelons to be loaded on board the assault ships, had its own unique problem. Commissioned 15 February 1944 at Cherry Point, North Carolina, this night fighter squadron had been equipped and trained for its mission of providing protection against enemy air attacks during the hours of darkness. Its assigned aircraft, a modified version of the Navy's standard fighter, the F6F (Hellcat) contained very complicated precision radar to aid in the night interception of enemy bombers. Although excellent in operating aspects and accurate at times for distances up to 60 miles, this radar required a great deal of maintenance to keep it in acceptable working condition.

The misfortunes of VMF(N)-541 began when it travelled some 10,000 miles from its staging area at Cherry Point and continued until its planes touched down on the repaired Peleliu airfield. At no time in this two-month period was there ever any testing or maintenance of the delicate radar equipment installed in the Hellcats, even though the flight echelon had flown over 5,000 miles. The

⁴¹ MAG-11 *Palau Rpt*, p. 1.

⁴² MAG-11 *Palau Rpt*, 1st End, p. 1.

⁴³ MAG-11 *Palau Rpt*, p. 2.

not unexpected result was that "every one required almost a major overhaul at a time when top performance was required."⁴⁴

Loading out at Espiritu Santo began 25 August, when the ground echelons of VMF-114, VMF-121, VMF-122, and VMF(N)-541 went on board the USS *Tryon* and *Centaurus*. These vessels sailed on the 25th and 27th, respectively, to rendezvous with the main naval task force at Guadalcanal. On 30 August, the ground echelons of VMTB-134 and the Headquarters and Service Squadrons of MAG-11 embarked in the S. S. *Mormacport* for their journey to Peleliu. Remaining behind at Espiritu Santo were the flight echelons and the rear echelon which would service the aircraft prior to departure for the Palaus and supervise the loading of the remaining gear.

*SOFTENING THE ENEMY'S DEFENSES*⁴⁵

Owing to the detailed planning by SWPA and CinCPOA air liaison officers, STALEMATE II's plans called for a wide-sweeping series of closely-meshed air support missions by both

carrier- and land-based aircraft embracing the period prior to, during, and after the amphibious landing. As early as March 1944, the Palaus had been struck by fast carrier forces of the Fifth Fleet, and further carrier-based attacks were again launched during July and August. SWPA's long-range planes, meanwhile, had flown reconnaissance and bombing runs over the target area and, in August, the Fifth Air Force's B-24s (Liberators) began a concentrated effort to knock out enemy defenses throughout the island chain.

A series of night flights from 8 August through 14 September dumped 91.2 tons of fragmentation, demolition, and incendiary bombs over the Palaus and, beginning 25 August, the heavy bombers braved Japanese fighters and heavy antiaircraft fire to make daylight bombing runs over the objective. In a total of 394 sorties, the Liberators dropped 793.6 tons of high explosives on the enemy defenses. In Koror Town alone, some 507 buildings were completely demolished, and major Japanese installations throughout the island chain were destroyed. By 5 September, photo reconnaissance revealed only 12 Japanese fighters, 12 floatplanes, and 3 observation aircraft still based in the Palaus. The enemy's airstrips, moreover, were badly cratered, and only the most extensive repairs would ever make them fully operative again.

Although the Palaus were beyond the range of CinCPOA's shore-based planes, other Japanese-held islands in the Carolines were not. Yap, Woleai, and Truk, for example, were hit repeatedly by naval bombers operating from recently captured Allied bases, while the Libera-

⁴⁴ VMF (N)-541 Rpt (Night Fighter Squadron, plane, personnel, and material requirements), dtd 25 Nov 44, hereafter *VMF(N)-541 Rpt*.

⁴⁵ Additional sources used for this section are: TG 38.3 OpO No. 1-44, dtd 25 Aug 44; TF 32 MovO No. A503-44, dtd 20 Aug 44; TG 32.1 AtkO No. A502-44, dtd 20 Aug 44; TG 32.15 AtkO No. 8-44, dtd 30 Aug 44; TU 32.7.1 OpO No. 1-44, dtd 5 Sep 44; VMF-314 Rpt of Observers aboard Aircraft Carriers during STALEMATE, dtd 17 Nov 44, hereafter *VMF-314 Rpt of Observers*; Fane and Moore, *The Naked Warriors*; Roscoe, *Submarine*.

tors of SWPA flew coordinated, reinforcing strikes against the same objectives. In addition, the B-24s struck at enemy airdromes on Celebes and in the southern Philippines in preparation for the later-scheduled carrier strikes by the Third Fleet.

To prevent confusion and to coordinate strategic air support missions, the heavy bombers of SWPA were to shift to night bombing runs as soon as American carriers began operations in the vicinity of the Palaus. In late August, one group of Admiral Mitscher's fast carriers made a diversionary raid against the enemy-held Volcano-Bonin Islands, while the other three proceeded to the Palaus and initiated a three-day aerial bombardment with a fighter sweep on the afternoon of 6 September. During the next two days, as the warplanes ranged over the islands, bombing and strafing, the cruisers and destroyers of the covering screen blasted away at the Japanese defenses ashore. These fast carrier groups then continued on to their additional mission of interdiction strikes against the enemy airbases in the southern Philippines.

After completing its diversionary raid in the Volcano-Bonins, the remaining fast carrier group struck at Yap and, on 10 September, its planes hit the Palaus. Notwithstanding the target's previous bombardment by both aircraft and warships, the naval pilots could lament that so many Japanese anti-aircraft batteries were still active that "Much time and many bombs were expended before return fire was sufficiently reduced to let us get down low for close observation and detection of small but important enemy positions, bivouac areas,

etc."⁴⁶ This carrier group remained near the Palaus, for it was scheduled to augment the striking power of the escort carriers during the prelanding bombardment and to provide additional firepower on D-Day, if needed.

Land-based planes of both the Southwest and Central Pacific commands, meanwhile, flew search and reconnaissance missions screening the approach to the target by transports and support ships of the Western Attack Force. The pilots, flying daylight patrols some 50 to 100 miles in advance of the main naval forces, had orders to attack and destroy any enemy planes encountered.

A unique addition to the screening forces was the Submarine Offensive Reconnaissance Group, which was utilized by Halsey during the Palau operation only. Composed of three wolf packs of three submarines each, the group was strung out in attack formation over a 300-mile front. The submarines, upon sighting any enemy forces, were to radio a warning of danger to the Western Attack Force and then attack to inflict the maximum damage. In addition, they were to provide rescue service for downed aviators and furnish on-the-spot weather information.

Before dawn on 12 September, the first echelon of the Escort Carrier Group and the warships of the Fire Support Group were off Peleliu ready to begin preliminary bombardment operations. The four escort carriers, soon to be

⁴⁶ Air IntelGru, CNO, "Comments on 'softening up' strikes in preparation for landing operations, taken from the report of R. L. Kibbe, Cdr, USN, Commander of Air Group Thirteen for the period 6-16 September 1944," dtd 25Nov44.

joined by another six, had the task of safeguarding the approach of the Western Attack Force to the target, assisting in the softening up of the island's defenses prior to the landing, and providing close air support once the Marines were ashore on Peleliu. In addition, four seaplane tenders were to arrive in Kossol Passage one day before the landing and, after their squadrons had joined them, were to provide air-sea rescue and lifeguard, weather, and reconnaissance missions.

The activity of all planes in the target area was closely coordinated with the naval gunfire and minesweeping operations by Admiral Wilkinson's Commander Support Aircraft. Control of the close fire support furnished to the infantry would be handled by the Joint Assault Signal Company (JASCO) teams. Each Marine battalion was assigned such a team, consisting of a naval gunfire officer, an aviation liaison officer, and a shore party officer, with the required communications personnel and equipment. Once ashore, the battalion commander had only to turn to an officer at his side and heavy guns firing shells up to 16-inch or planes capable of bombing, strafing, or launching rockets were at his disposal. The Commander, Support Aircraft, could, at his discretion, relinquish control of all planes in the area to the ground commander once the expeditionary troops were firmly established on the beachhead.

First to venture in close to the target were the vessels of the Kossol Passage Detachment, which began minesweeping operations along the approaches to the designated transport and fire sup-

port areas. Later, these minesweepers would clear the Kossol Passage, which would be utilized as a roadstead where ships might await call to Peleliu for unloading and in which replenishment of fuel, stores, and ammunition could be accomplished.

At 0530 on the 12th, the large caliber guns of Rear Admiral Jesse B. Oldendorf's Fire Support Group, consisting of 5 old battleships, 4 heavy cruisers, 4 light cruisers, and 14 destroyers, began blasting away at Peleliu's defenses. For two hours, the warships steamed in a zigzag pattern off the island and fired at preselected targets. When this naval barrage ceased temporarily, carrier planes appeared over Peleliu's interior and began flying strikes against the defenses there. Following this two-hour aerial bombardment, the heavy naval guns resumed their deliberate fire. This alternating of naval gunfire and aerial bombardment was the procedure followed during the three days prior to the assault. During this time, the warships expended some 519 rounds of 16-inch shells, 1,845 rounds of 14-inch, 1,427 rounds of 8-inch, 1,020 rounds of 6-inch, and 12,937 rounds of 5-inch, for a total of 2,255 tons of ammunition.

Special UDTs, meanwhile, had been landed on the reef, where they began their important tasks of removing underwater obstacles, blasting ramps for LSTs and pathways for DUKWs in the coral, clearing boulders from roadways, and placing buoys and markers. Clad only in swimming trunks, these underwater experts were constantly fired at by Japanese with rifles and machine guns during the dangerous process of destroying the underwater obstructions,

which an American admiral described as "the most formidable which we encountered in the entire Pacific."⁴⁷

Originally, the gunfire support plan called for only two days of preparatory bombardment prior to D-Day, but the strong protests of General Geiger had persuaded Admiral Wilkinson to add another day. This extra time, however, did not mean that a larger number of shells were fired; instead, the extra day merely allowed the same amount of ammunition to be expended with greater deliberation over a longer period of time. Since the Japanese had skillfully camouflaged their artillery positions and refused to be goaded into returning fire, Admiral Oldendorf was of the opinion that the "best that can be done is to blast away at suspected positions and hope for the best."⁴⁸ As a result, he ended the bombardment early, explaining that all targets on Peleliu worthy of naval gunfire had been destroyed.

Although the awesome weight, explosive power, and armor-piercing quality of the shells expended had transformed Peleliu's exterior "into a barren wasteland,"⁴⁹ neither the enemy nor his prepared defenses had been obliterated. Artillery had been hidden carefully in underground caves, some of which had steel doors to protect their interiors, while the troops had been placed in sheltered areas, from which they could emerge, unscathed and combat-ready,

after the American barrage lifted. Frustrating as it was for one Japanese soldier in a machine cannon company to remain huddled in his shelter while the warships shelled Peleliu with impunity—the sight so infuriated him that he "could feel the blood pounding in my veins throughout my body"⁵⁰—the fact remains that only one man in his outfit was injured by the prelanding bombardment, and then only slightly. As Oldendorf later admitted, "My surprise and chagrin when concealed batteries opened up on the LVTs can be imagined."⁵¹ In addition, one huge Japanese blockhouse, which the assaulting Marines confidently believed would be demolished since it was pinpointed on their maps, was later found to have escaped damage completely from any of the naval shells.⁵²

Oldendorf's decision to break off fire has been described as being "entirely correct," by Admiral Fort, who was present at the bombardment of Peleliu. The "idea which some people seem to have of just firing at an island is," said the admiral, "an inexcusable waste of ammunition."⁵³ Colonel William H. Har-

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Oldendorf ltr.*

⁵² Admiral Oldendorf commented that this blockhouse was not shown on the maps furnished him and that during "the preliminary bombardment and until several days after the landing, my entire staff was on the sick list, only my flag lieutenant remaining on his feet. This threw a heavy load on me, as I not only had to supervise the details of the daytime operations but also operate tactically at night during withdrawals." *Ibid.*

⁵³ RAdm George H. Fort ltr to DirMCHist, dtd 20Mar50, in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Fort ltr.*

⁴⁷ Adm Jesse B. Oldendorf ltr to DirMCHist, dtd 25Mar50, in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Oldendorf ltr.*

⁴⁸ *Oldendorf ltr.*

⁴⁹ CinCPac-CinCPOA Translations Item No. 12,190, "Extracts taken from the diary of an unidentified man," 15May-15Sep44.

rison, commanding the 11th Marines at Peleliu, held somewhat similar views, for he doubted "whether 10 times the gunfire would have helped."⁵⁴

Among the Marines actually storming the shelled and bombed beaches at Peleliu and assaulting the still intact Japanese defenses and fortifications, however, there grew a belief, verging later on a feeling of bitterness, that the preparatory naval gunfire left some-

thing to be desired. After the war, this belief was shared by two historians of amphibious warfare, Isely and Crowl, who wrote that:

... the conclusion cannot be avoided that preliminary naval gunfire on Peleliu was inadequate, and that the lessons learned at Guam were overlooked. . . . Peleliu, like Tarawa and to a lesser extent Saipan, demonstrated that the only substitute for such prolonged bombardment was costly expenditure of the lives of the assault troops.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Comments on the Palau (Peleliu) Monograph by Col William H. Harrison, n.d., hereafter *Harrison cmts.*

⁵⁵ Isely and Crowl, *U.S. Marines and Amphibious War*, p. 403.

D-Day on Peleliu¹

FIRST WAVES ASHORE²

Dawn on 15 September 1944 broke calm and clear at 0552. Sharply silhouetted against the first rays of sunlight were the American warships which filled the waters off White and Orange Beaches at Peleliu as far as the eye

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this chapter is derived from: *III PhibFor STALEMATE II Rpt*; *ExTrps SAR*; *IIIAC Palaus Rpt*; *1st MarDiv SAR*; *1st MarDiv WarD*, 15Sep44; *1st MarDiv D-2 Jnl*, dtd 15Sep44, hereafter *1st MarDiv D-2 Jnl*, with appropriate date; *1st MarDiv D-3 Jnl*, dtd 15Sep44, hereafter *1st MarDiv D-3 Jnl*, with appropriate date; *1st MarDiv D-3 Periodic Rpt*, dtd 15Sep44, hereafter *1st MarDiv D-3 Periodic Rpt*, with appropriate date; *4th War Dog Platoon, IIIAC, Peleliu OpRpt*, 15-30 Sep44, dtd 20Nov44, hereafter *4th War Dog Plat Peleliu OpRpt*; *Peleliu Comment File*; *Japanese CenPac Ops*; *Smith, Narrative*; *Hough, Assault on Peleliu*; *Morison, Leyte*; *Smith, Approach to the Philippines*; *Isely and Crowl, U.S. Marines and Amphibious War*; *McMillan, The Old Breed*; *Historical Committee, 81st Infantry Division*.

² Additional sources used for this section are: *TF 32 Peleliu and Angaur Rpt*; *TF 32 OPlan A501-44*, dtd 15Aug44; *"1st Mar Hist"*; *5th Mar OpRpt*, 17Aug-16Oct44, n.d., hereafter *5th Mar OpRpt*, with appropriate date; *3/1 Rec of Events*, 26Aug-10Oct44, n.d., hereafter *3/1 Rec of Events*, with appropriate date; *3/7 WarD*, 24Aug-30Oct44, dtd 18Nov44, hereafter *3/7 WarD*, with appropriate date; *Boyer, ArmdAmphibianBn*; *Cdr. C. M. Blackford, USCG, "They were all Giants at Peleliu," USNI Proceedings*, v. 76, no. 10 (Oct50), pp. 1114-1117, hereafter *Blackford, "Giants at Peleliu."*

could see. Fortunately for the Marine division scheduled to assault the strongly held enemy island, the weather was ideal for amphibious operations. Only a slight surf was running, and visibility was unlimited in practically every direction.³

With his fire support ships already in position, Admiral Oldendorf in the U. S. heavy cruiser *Louisville* gave the command and, about 0530, shells began slamming into the target areas. By this time, the green-clad Marines slated to comprise the assault waves already were loaded in their assigned LVTs and were being dispatched toward the line of departure. As the amphibian tractors formed into waves behind the LVT(A)s and began their approach to the beaches, the steady stream of naval shells overhead increased in fury.

On board their amphibious command ships, USS *Mount Olympus* and *Mount McKinley*, the ranking Navy and Marine commanders observed the complicated landing operation, while the staff of the 1st Marine Division functioned from the

³ Flying conditions, in fact, were so phenomenally good, not only on D-Day but throughout the period of carrier air support, that on "no occasion was it necessary to deny a mission request from an air liaison party because of adverse weather, and on only a few occasions was it necessary to postpone temporarily the granting of a mission because of local weather conditions." *TF 32 Peleliu and Angaur Rpt*, Encl F, p. 4.



MARINES boarding landing craft off Peleliu. (USMC A94889)



ASSAULT FORCE under enemy fire at Orange Beach 3. Note burning amtracs in background. (USMC 94937)

U. S. assault transport *DuPage*. Although this vessel had been equipped as a command ship, the Marines still had to furnish much of their own equipment for communication purposes while afloat.

Beginning at 0750, 50 carrier planes bombed enemy gun positions and installations on the beaches. Not once during this 15-minute aerial strike did the roar of the ships' guns cease, since the plan called for the pilots to remain above the flat trajectory of the naval shells. While the Commander, Support Aircraft, was busy coordinating air operations with naval gunfire, the Advance Commander, Support Aircraft, who had handled this task during the preliminary bombardment, prepared to go ashore, where he would be able to assume control in the event the *Mount Olympus* became disabled. Destroyers, meanwhile, had placed white phosphorus shells on the ridges of the Umurbrogol to blanket observation by the Japanese artillerymen there, while the heavier warships had shifted to close fire support and begun firing high explosives on the beaches to pulverize their defenses.

The initial assault wave of LVT(A)s crossed the line of departure at 0800 and churned toward White and Orange Beaches, closely followed by the LVTs filled with infantry. Preceding were the 18 LCIs (Landing Craft, Infantry), which had been equipped with 4.5-inch rocket launchers. After approaching within 1,000 yards of the shore, these vessels took up positions and began unleashing salvos of 22 rockets each. When the third assault wave passed the LCIs, they moved to the flanks of the landing

beaches, ready to deliver "on call" fire. Four other LCIs, mounting 4.2-inch mortars, were stationed on the left (north) flank just off the reef to keep up a continuous fire on the rugged terrain in back of White Beach 1.

No sooner had the sound of the rocket salvos ceased, than 48 fighter-bombers flown by naval fliers appeared in the skies overhead. Peeling off, these planes struck at the landing beaches in a finely coordinated maneuver which kept at least eight of them in attack at any one time. Employing bombs, rockets, and machine guns, they poured down an effective neutralizing fire after the support ships had shifted their targets inland and to the flanks of the beaches and during the amphibian tractors' final run to the shore. As the foremost wave approached the water's edge, the fire of the planes gradually moved inland, at no time coming closer to the LVT(A)s than 200 yards.

At 0832, the armored amphibians clambered out of the water onto land, their 37mm and 75mm cannon placing fire upon the beach defenses. A minute later, the first troop wave touched the shoreline, whereupon the assault Marines hurriedly departed their LVTs and fanned out over the coral sands. Succeeding waves continued to land at one-minute intervals. The sight greeting these early arrivals on the beachhead has been aptly described by one of the participants:

Our amtrac [LVT] was among the first assault waves, yet the beach was already a litter of burning, blackened amphibian tractors, of dead and wounded, a mortal garden of exploding mortar shells. Holes

had been scooped in the white sand or had been blasted out by the shells, the beach was pocked with holes—all filled with green-clad helmeted Marines.⁴

Only the few scattered Japanese that somehow had survived the bombardment opposed the landing, but as the LVT(A)s led the attack inland off the beach, a steadily increasing volume of enemy artillery, mortar, machine gun, and rifle fire hampered the advance. Strewn over the beaches and reaching about 100 yards inland were numerous land mines, many of them naval types whose "horns (lead covered bottles of acid) had not been maintained properly and practically all of these mines failed to detonate. Had these mines been effective the results would have been disastrous."⁵ For reasons unknown, many of the mines had been set on "safe," a possible indication that the Japanese may have expected the landing on the eastern shore, where the mines were fully armed and fused.⁶

The Marines advanced inland beyond the beaches, maintaining their initial momentum despite increasing resistance and heavy losses. As a chaplain with

the assault waves marvelled later, "how we got through the murderous mortar fire which the Japs were laying down on the reef we'll never know. The bursts were everywhere and our men were being hit, left and right."⁷ Carefully sited Japanese high velocity weapons also wreaked havoc on the advancing tractors. A 47mm cannon hidden in a coral point jutting into the sea just north of White Beach 1 and antiboat guns located on the southwestern promontory and on a nearby small island kept up a devastating enfilading fire upon the approaches to the beaches, as well as upon the beach flanks themselves.

As more and more LVTs were destroyed, and their burning hulls cluttered up the beaches, a shortage of these all-important vehicles was soon felt. The division's action report gave the official number of LVTs destroyed that day as 26, but "unofficial estimates by assault unit commanders bring the total knocked out at least temporarily in excess of 60."⁸ This discrepancy in figures probably arose because of the observers' inability to differentiate between the blazing LVTs and DUKWs, as well as the Marines' great skill and ingenuity in repairing crippled LVTs and thus restoring them to usefulness.

Despite the heavy losses in amphibian tractors, subsequent waves continued to

⁴ Robert Leckie, *Helmet for My Pillow* (New York: Random House, 1957), p. 286, hereafter Leckie, *Helmet*, used with permission.

⁵ LtCol William E. Benedict ltr to CMC, dtd 27Feb50, in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Benedict ltr*. "The two types most frequently encountered were 50 kg. aerial bombs buried with the tail assembly down and a pressure detonating fuse extending some three inches above the ground, and the two-horn naval anti-invasion mine. Regarding the latter, it is of interest to note that a great majority were not armed." *1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase II, Part I to Anx C, p. 6.

⁶ *Fort ltr*.

⁷ Chaplain Edgar E. Siskin ltr, reproduced in *Hebrew Union College Bulletin* (Apr45), pp. 7-8.

⁸ Hough, *Assault on Peleliu*, p. 37. Oddly enough, this was the same number that the Japanese claimed to have destroyed on D-Day. *Japanese CenPac Ops*, p. 84.

move shoreward. Landing simultaneously with the fourth wave were the division's tanks (M-4 Shermans). Because of their excellent waterproofing for the operation, they successfully negotiated the reef, where the worst of the underwater obstacles had been removed by UDTs, and continued toward land in six parallel columns led by their respective LVT guides. The enemy fire, however, proved so intense that over half of 30 tanks organic to the division suffered from one to four hits during the 10 minutes necessary to cross the reef. In the 1st Marines' zone, for example, only one of the assigned tanks escaped being hit during the trip ashore. Only three, however, were completely knocked out of action. "Thus within a half hour after the initial landing the infantry had full tank support—a record unsurpassed in any previous Marine landing in the Central Pacific, except for the Marshalls."⁹

TRouble ON THE LEFT¹⁰

Colonel Lewis B. Puller's 1st Marines came in over the White Beaches on schedule. Its 3d Battalion (3/1)¹¹ landed

⁹ Isely and Crowl, *U.S. Marines and Amphibious War*, p. 404.

¹⁰ Additional sources consulted for this section are: *1stMarHist*; 1/1 UHist, dtd 23Nov44, hereafter 1/1 UHist; 3/1 *Rec of Events*, 15Sep44; George P. Hunt, *Coral Comes High* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1946), hereafter Hunt, *Coral Comes High*.

¹¹ For ease of reference, this numerical abbreviation will be used throughout the volume. For example, the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines will be referred to sometimes simply as 2/5. This designation should be understood to include the reinforcing troops that make a battalion a BLT.

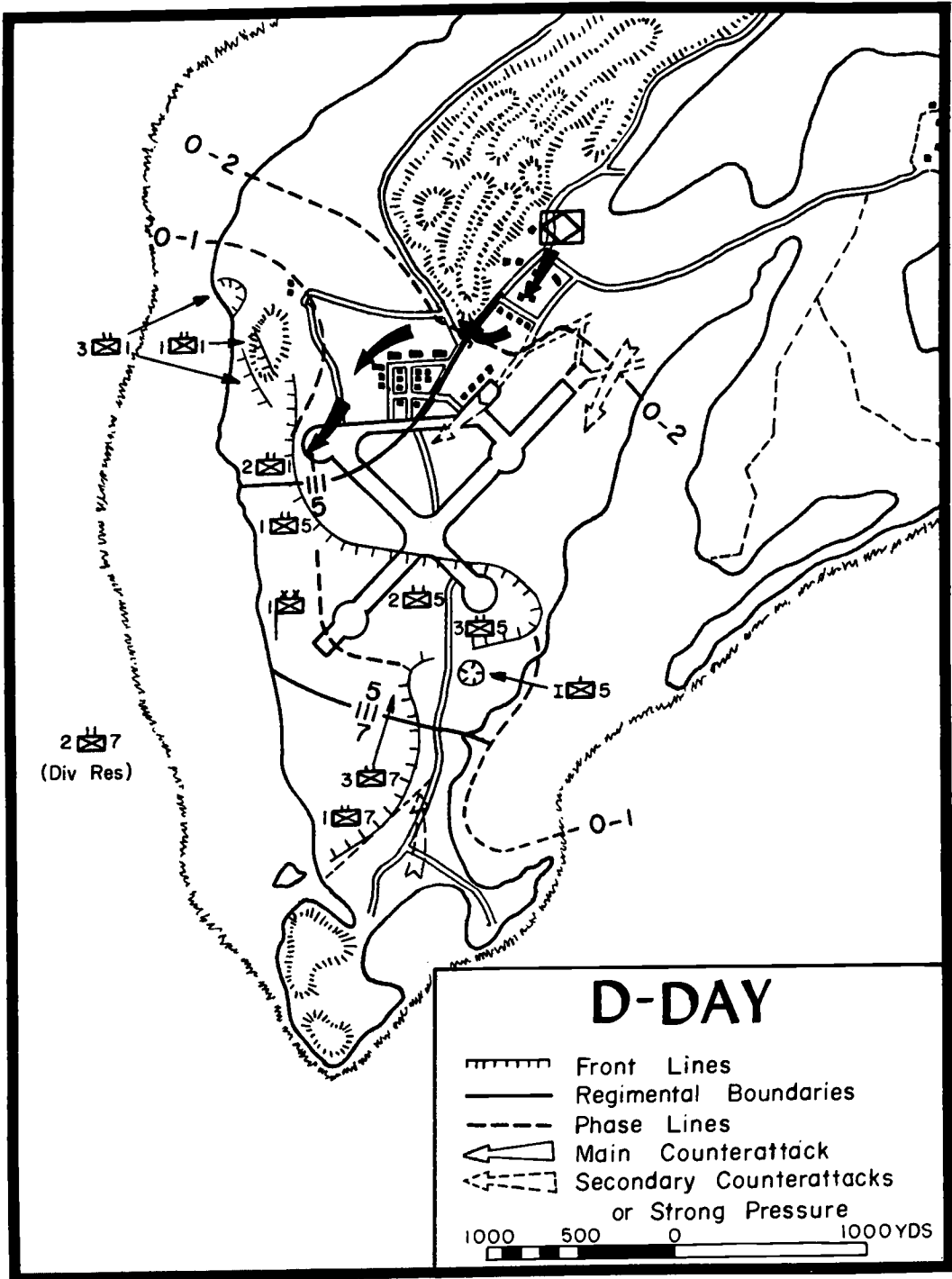
on White Beach 1, the 2d on White Beach 2, with the 1st landing over White Beach 1 at 0945 as regimental reserve. Colonel Puller rode in with the first troop wave and, as his LVT grounded:

....went up and over that side as fast as I could scramble and ran like hell at least twenty-five yards before I hit the beach, flat down.... Every platoon leader was trying to form a line of his own, just as I was.... That big promontory on my left hadn't been touched by the ship's guns and planes, and we got a whirlwind of machine gun and anti-tank fire.¹²

Landing with Companies K and I in assault, 3/1 (Lieutenant Colonel Stephen V. Sabol) ran into the most determined resistance, which, coupled with the severe enemy shelling and unexpected obstacles, hindered its progress toward phase line 0-1 (See Map 4). As the left assault unit, Company K was to act as the pivot when the regiment turned north. Its immediate objective was the Point—a jagged coral outcropping jutting into the sea and rising some 30 feet above the water's edge—from which Japanese gunners were placing a dangerous enfilading fire upon the division's flank. Company K, led by Captain George P. Hunt, was destined to execute a classic example of a small-unit attack on a fortified position.

The assault rifle platoons climbed out of their LVTs onto the white coral sand only to find themselves about 100 yards to the right of their assigned area. Company K immediately attacked inland, nevertheless, and initiated its turning movement northward with two platoons in assault. The 3d Platoon on the left

¹² Quoted in Davis, *Marine!*, pp. 217-218.



Map 4

E.L. Wilson

close to the shore fought its way to within 50 yards of The Point before its attack stalled. The 2d Platoon pushed straight ahead some 75 yards before stumbling into a tank trap and becoming pinned down by heavy fire coming from the northern end of a long coral ridge that loomed up some 30-40 feet to the right front of the startled Marines. The precipitous face of this obstacle, shown on none of the photographs or maps supplied to the 1st Marines, was honeycombed with caves and dug-in positions swarming with Japanese soldiers. By this time, the heavy fighting against stiff enemy resistance had reduced the effective strength of each of the assault platoons to approximately a squad, and contact between the two units had been severed.

Ignoring the gap between his assault units, Captain Hunt sent his reserve platoon forward to press the attack against the assigned objective, The Point.¹³ Before this formidable stronghold could be seized, Company K would have to overcome five reinforced-concrete pillboxes, one of which housed a 47mm cannon, and the others, heavy machine guns. Each pillbox had from 6 to 12 occupants, while other Japanese infantrymen, some with light machine guns, had been placed in nearby dug-in positions and coral depressions to provide protective fire. All of these carefully prepared defenses were still intact at the time of the Marine as-

sault, despite Colonel Puller's having insisted upon, and received, assurances from naval officers that this strategic area enfilading his flank would be properly blanketed with fire during the preliminary bombardment.¹⁴

Since The Point's fires were oriented primarily towards the landing beach area, the Marines decided to assault the bastion from the rear (east). Gathering up the remnants of the 3d Platoon, Second Lieutenant William A. Willis and his 1st Platoon began slugging their way toward the top of the objective in the face of concentrated enemy fire. After killing off its protecting infantrymen, the Marines approached each pillbox from its blind spot to blast the occupants with grenades. Finally, the attackers broke through the maze of infantry positions and pillboxes to storm the crest of The Point, but beneath them at the water's edge could be heard the roar of the 47mm cannon that had wreaked havoc among the Marines all morning.

Stealthily easing down toward the reinforced-concrete casemate from above, Lieutenant Willis managed to lob a smoke grenade right in front of the embrasure, temporarily blinding the gunners inside. Mere seconds later, another Marine fired a rifle grenade through the

¹³ "If any portion of my plan was to break down, the seizure of the Point must not. Should we fail to capture and hold the Point the entire regimental beach would be exposed to heavy fire from the flank." Hunt, *Coral Comes High*, p. 17.

¹⁴ Davis, *Marine!*, p. 214. "At a conference on the flagship sometime prior to D-Day Col Puller requested that naval gunfire be put down on this point even though no enemy gun emplacements could be detected from photographs." Col Richard P. Ross, Jr., memo to DirMCHist, dtd 7Nov49. *3/1 Rec of Events*, 15Sep44, states that "The entire point and its defenses were untouched by naval gunfire; in fact, the entire length of Beach White One was only moderately damaged by our preparatory firings and bombings."

gun port. This bursting grenade probably ignited some stacked ammunition, for the whole interior almost immediately became seared with white-hot flames. When the fleeing Japanese, their clothes aflame and their cartridge belts exploding from the intense heat, dashed out, pre-positioned Marine riflemen cut them down.

By 1015, Company K had fulfilled its mission, killing a counted 110 enemy soldiers in the process. As a result, the enfilading fire from the left flank had been silenced, but the cost to the Marines had been high. Out of the two-platoon assault force, Captain Hunt could find only 32 survivors with whom to set up a hasty perimeter defense, for his other platoon was still pinned down in the antitank trap near the coral ridge. Hurriedly a captured Japanese machine gun was rushed into use, for this handful of men soon found themselves isolated on the extreme left flank of the division and the object of determined counterattacks by small enemy groups.

By this time, the 3d Battalion's 81mm mortar platoon, which had suffered 11 casualties and lost a base plate soon after landing, was working its way southward on the crowded beach, seeking room to set up firing positions. The early confusion of the landing was severely intensified by heavy enemy fire, for mortars and artillery continued to shell the shallow beachhead, while Japanese on the coral ridge some 70 yards inland swept the area with light and heavy machine gun and rifle fire. From time to time, the ammunition in a shattered, blazing tractor would explode, scattering burning debris over the beach and its scurrying occupants. To avoid

certain destruction, succeeding waves of amphibian vehicles merely dumped their contents in the midst of support platoons engaged in clearing out small pockets of enemy resistance and hurried back to the reef for another load.

Efforts of 3/1 to expand the beachhead area proved disappointing. Not only had a gap been opened between elements of Company K, but its contact with Company I, attacking on the right through swampy terrain near the 2d Battalion, had been severed. Within 15 minutes of The Point's seizure, Lieutenant Colonel Sabol ordered two platoons from his reserve (the recently landed Company L) to fill the gap between the two assault companies. Before these riflemen could complete the mission, they too were stopped by heavy fires from the southern portion of the same ridge that had kept the right assault platoon of Company K pinned down. Despite repeated attempts at both flanking and frontal assaults, the reserve group failed to dislodge the entrenched foe. Thus there was no resumption of the advance to establish contact. The battalion commander, meanwhile, had thrown in his last reserve platoon to plug the undesirable gap in Company K's lines between The Point and the long coral ridge.

While 3/1 attempted to remedy its frontline problems, the Japanese had become aware of this opening between Company K's assault platoon and had thrust massed troops into the area. When the reserve platoon arrived on the scene, these enemy soldiers aggressively resisted all attempts by the small Marine force to expel them. Since he had exhausted all the battalion's reserves,

Lieutenant Colonel Sabol requested regimental assistance to deal with this dangerous enemy-held salient in the Marine line.

The Marines of 1/1's Company A hurled themselves into the breach between The Point and the ridge, but superior and concentrated Japanese fire from the coral ridge to their right front caused the attack to bog down by inflicting severe casualties. For several hours, the Marines pressed determined attacks, including tank/infantry assaults, against both the enemy salient and the dug-in foe on the ridge. Finally, elements of Company A succeeded in storming the southern slopes of the ridge where some Marines secured a foothold and made contact with Company I on their right. Late in the afternoon, Company B of 1/1 passed through the depleted ranks of Company A to press the attack, but enemy fire from the ridge halted the advance for the day.

After commitment, the regiment's reserve battalion established contact between the assaulting rifle companies and narrowed the gap between The Point and the ridge, but the opening still was there and the danger to the division's left flank remained. Had the Japanese launched a major counterattack down the corridor between the ridge and the sea, they might have succeeded in penetrating to the beaches, which were cluttered with the men, gear, and supplies brought in by later waves. The effect upon the beachhead could have been disastrous; in fact, the possibility existed that the Marines might have been driven into the sea.

To counter this threat, Colonel Puller used the remainder of the regimental

reserve, as well as headquarters personnel and 100 men of the 1st Engineer Battalion, to form a secondary line of defense blocking the route down the corridor. The feared counterattack in force did not come, either because the Japanese failed to capitalize upon this tactical opportunity or because the Marines' fire support overwhelmed enemy attempts at massing the troops necessary to exploit the gap.

In contrast to the opposition encountered by 3/1, the 2d Battalion (Lieutenant Colonel Russell E. Honsowetz) found relatively less resistance. Upon hitting White Beach 2, the assault companies of 2/1 spread out and drove inland, as a corporal later recorded in his diary:

I rushed forward with the others—dashing, dodging and jumping over logs and bushes. We must have moved in a hundred yards or so when we came to a swamp. . . . I fell flat on my face and pushed my nose deep into the moist jungle floor, waiting for more fire from the Japs; maybe I could spot them . . . started to wade into the swamp, the Nips again opened fire—burst after burst, and some did find the mark. . . .¹⁵

Advancing inland against resistance described as moderate, the Marines, making use of all their organic weapons and paced by surviving LVT(A)s, pushed on through the heavy woods and swamps, bypassing well-organized enemy strongholds or eliminating them with flamethrowers and demolitions, until they reached the 0-1 phase line—about 350 yards inland—by 0945. Here, in the wooded area facing the airfield, the battalion made a firm contact with

¹⁵ Quoted in McMillan, *The Old Breed*, p. 283.

elements of the 5th Marines, thus securing the right flank of the regiment, and held up, awaiting orders to proceed to the next phase line. The 2d Battalion remained here, however, until the following morning because of the precarious situation on the left.

CENTRAL DRIVE TO THE AIRFIELD¹⁶

The 5th Marines, commanded by Colonel Harold D. Harris, landed in the center with two battalions abreast, the other as reserve following closely. As the left flank unit, the 1st Battalion came in over Orange Beach 1 with two rifle companies in assault, while the 3d Battalion landed in the same formation over Orange 2. The enemy had made extensive use of double-horned mines on both beaches. Altogether, there were three rows of them, laid in a checker-board pattern and emplaced at about one-meter intervals. Rough weather prior to D-Day had deposited almost a foot of sand on these mines and substantially decreased their effectiveness. A number of LVTs and DUKWs were disabled by them, however, and became easy targets for the enemy artillery.

¹⁶ Additional sources used for this section are: *5th Mar OpRpt*, 15Sep44; B-3 Jnl, 15Sep-16Oct44, hereafter *1/5 B-3 Jnl*, with appropriate date; *2/5 OpRpt*, 17Aug44-1Jan-45, n.d., hereafter *2/5 OpRpt*, with appropriate date; *3/5 Rpt of Opns*, 26Aug-7Nov44, n.d., hereafter *3/5 Rpt of Ops*, with appropriate date; *3/7 WarD*, 15Sep44; *2/11 SAR*, 24Aug-29Sep44, n.d., hereafter *2/11 SAR*; LtCol Robert W. Boyd, "1st Battalion, Fifth Marines, 1st Marine Division in the Palau Operation: A Summary of Offensive Action," (Quantico, Va.: Marine Corps Schools, Amphibious Warfare School, Senior Course 1948-1949), hereafter Boyd, *1/5 PalauOp*.

Another period of rough weather soon after D-Day washed the sand from atop these mines and made their location and removal easier.¹⁷

The assault troops of 1/5 (Lieutenant Colonel Robert W. Boyd) disembarked from their LVTs about 25 yards inland and began a rapid advance eastward through the coconut palms. Encountering only scattered Japanese riflemen and an occasional machine gun, the infantrymen pushed on until they reached the open area on the west edge of the airfield at 0900. Shortly after reaching the phase line 0-1, they tied in with Marine elements on both flanks.

Across the airfield lay phase line 0-2, but when orders did not come for the advance to continue, the battalion readied its riflemen and automatic weapons along a defensive line. Other Marines with grenade launchers and bazookas took up positions to provide cover both along the front and in depth; four 37mm antitank guns were placed in defilade in shell craters across the front; and machine guns were set up to serve as breakthrough guns in the event the Japanese counterattacked. When three tanks of Company B, 1st Tank Battalion, arrived, they were spaced out and placed in hull defilade among the bomb craters.

The caution exercised by the battalion during this phase of the operation derived from the preparatory phase. Shortly before the division left the Russell Islands, a careful study of aerial photographs had unearthed something

¹⁷ BGen Harold D. Harris ltr to HistBr, dtd 12Jun66, in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Harris ltr*.

that bore a very marked resemblance to tank tracks. A tank-supported counterattack debouching from the area north of the airfield seemed highly probable, since this area offered both cover and concealment. Based on this conclusion, the bulk of the anti-tank weapons and the limited number of tanks available to the 5th Marines were assigned to back up 1/5.¹⁸

By early afternoon, a battery of 2/11's 75mm pack howitzers was ashore and digging firing positions just to the right rear of 1/5. All of the artillery batteries' guns, ammunition, and equipment had to be manhandled to this position from the beach, since antitank obstacles prevented the use of LVTs. The mission of 2/11 was to support the attack of the 5th Marines, as well as to supply reinforcing fires in the zone of the 1st Marines. By 1510, the battalion's Fire Direction Center (FDC) was functioning and, 55 minutes later, the first artillery mission was fired at a Japanese gun emplacement. As these howitzers went into action, they replaced the LVT(A)s in providing supporting fire for infantry units.

Although 1/5 was to remain poised on phase line 0-1 because of the 1st Marines' failure to advance, the 5th Marines' 3d Battalion (Lieutenant Colonel Austin C. Shofner) was to surge deep into the interior of Peleliu. It came in over Beach Orange 2 with Company I on the left, K on the right, and L in reserve. After the assault troops oriented themselves, they immediately cleared the beach and attacked directly east. Company I soon tied in with ele-

ments of 1/5 and gained the first objective, phase line 0-1, within an hour of landing.

Company K, meanwhile, had run into trouble. In fact, for at least 15 minutes after H-Hour, it was the right flank unit of the entire division landing. The LVTs carrying 3/7, scheduled to land on Beach Orange 3, encountered some serious underwater obstacles, which, coupled with the heavy enfilading fire from the right, caused the drivers to veer to the left. Accordingly, about half of 3/7's assault units actually landed on Beach Orange 2, where they became intermingled with 3/5's elements.¹⁹

No sooner had 3/5's Company K extricated itself from the predicament on the beach and begun its advance, than a heavy enemy mortar barrage on the southern part of Beach Orange 2 and just inland halted its forward progress. When the barrage lifted a half hour later, and after elements of 3/7 took up their positions on the right flank of Company K, the delayed movement toward phase line 0-1 began. Upon reaching the edge of the airfield, the attacking company ran into several mutually-supporting concrete and log pillboxes, which had to be reduced before the first objective could be reached. About 1000, however, the company tied in with Company I on the first phase line.

When the push to the east was resumed some 30 minutes later, Company K retained contact with the advancing

¹⁸ *Harris ltr.*

¹⁹ "It was noted in this connection that having the third battalions of two regiments as adjacent units added to the difficulty of reorganization on the beach since there were two 'I' Companies, two 'K' Companies, and two 'L' Companies involved." *3/7 WarD*, 15Sep44.

elements of 3/7 on the right flank, but quickly lost touch with Company I on the left, for this unit had the responsibility of remaining tied in with 1/5. As Company K continued to push through the scrub forest, the commanding officer had trouble maintaining contact between his platoons. Not only did the thick undergrowth limit visibility to a few feet, but enemy snipers kept up a heavy harassing fire. Company L, which had been sent up to plug the gap between Companies I and K, found the going much easier through the light underbrush in its zone. Shortly after noon, the two assaulting companies were stalled by a series of mutually supporting pillboxes and trenches manned by Japanese with automatic weapons. Only after a platoon of tanks could be brought up was this obstruction reduced, but by this time, contact between Company K and elements of 3/7 on the right had been severed.

The 2d Battalion (regimental reserve), meanwhile, had finished landing over Beach Orange 2 by 1015. Quickly clearing the beach, 2/5 pushed on to the front, where it relieved Company I. This unit then passed around the rear of Company L and assumed a position between the other assaulting companies of 3/5, thereby reducing Company K's frontage. Following its relief of Company I, the 2d Battalion launched a vigorous drive eastward. Later that afternoon, 2/5 shifted the direction of its attack northward. Upon the completion of this turning movement, during which time the battalion's left flank was kept anchored to 1/5's static defensive positions, the assault elements of the 2d Battalion were deployed around the en-

tire southern edge of the airfield. On the battalion's right and still retaining contact was Company L of 3/5, which was attacking straight across the island in coordination with the other rifle companies of 3/5.

After the reduction of the nest of pillboxes that had pinned 3/5 down, the battalion's advance resumed. Control of that afternoon's attack, however, proved extremely difficult and, even today, what actually happened is not completely known. In advancing through the thick scrub jungle that was devoid of any easily recognizable landmark, the riflemen were guided by maps that only sketchily portrayed the terrain. Difficulties in maintaining direction, control, and contact were compounded by steady enemy resistance. Flank elements had to take but a few extra steps to the side and contact became lost with neighboring units. The battalion's control problem was further complicated because of the earlier loss of the LVT carrying practically all of the wire and equipment of 3/5's communication platoon. Although most of these Marines managed to wade ashore and join the battalion early in the afternoon, they had been able to salvage for future use little of the vital equipment.

During the delay caused by the Japanese pillboxes, 3/5 had lost contact on its right flank with elements of 3/7. Shortly after resuming the advance, Lieutenant Colonel Shofner received a radio message from 3/7's command post (CP) stating that its left flank unit was on a north-south trail about 200 yards ahead of 3/5's right flank element. Shofner ordered Companies I and K to push rapidly forward. The left

flank unit of 3/7, meanwhile, was to hold up waiting for Company K to come abreast. The two 5th Marines companies pressed on across the island, almost reaching the eastern beaches, but never did contact any of 3/7's elements. About 1500, another radio message from 3/7's CP informed Shofner that the position of 3/7's left flank unit had been given incorrectly. Actually, at the time Company K began its push inland, 3/7's left flank was some 200 yards in the rear of that 5th Marines company. The attack of Company K, while 3/7's left flank elements held up, served to widen the existing gap.

When the true location of 3/7's left flank became known, Shofner ordered Company K to bend its right flank back in an effort to tie in with the adjoining regiment. Because its rifle platoons were already committed, the company had to press headquarters personnel into service in order to extend the line far enough, but even then the flanking 3/7's elements were not sighted by dark. During this late afternoon attack, moreover, Shofner's unit was experiencing trouble in retaining contact between its rifle companies. Only 3/5's left flank unit, Company L, managed to press its advance eastward, all the while remaining tied in with elements of 2/5 on the left. Company L was to have the distinction of being the only Marine unit to cut completely across the island and reach the opposite beach on D-Day.

All cohesion as a battalion ceased about 1700 when 3/5's CP was struck by a well-placed enemy mortar barrage which wounded the battalion commander. Following Shofner's evacuation, Lieutenant Colonel Lewis W. Walt,

executive officer of the 5th Marines, assumed command, only to be faced with the problem of regaining control over the scattered units. Setting out on a personal reconnaissance, Walt first located Company L, one platoon of which was still tied in with 2/5 on the airfield while the other two were preparing a perimeter defense for the night some 100 yards farther south in the jungle. After ordering the two isolated platoons back to the airfield to set up a linear defense in conjunction with 2/5, the battalion commander next discovered the long-lost left flank of 3/7, which was already digging in for the night on the edge of the airfield some 400 yards in from the beach.

Not until 2100, however, did Walt and his runner find Company I, and then only after a difficult passage through the jungle in the dark. The Marines, isolated from all other friendly troops and in a perimeter defense, were some 200 yards south of the airfield and about 300 yards short of the eastern shore. Walt dispatched the company toward the airfield with orders to tie in on the right flank of Company L. Some 100 yards farther southwest from Company I, the battalion commander located the last of his units, Company K. It was sent back to the airfield to tie in between Company I and the left flank company of 3/7, thereby finishing the forming of a defensive line along the edge of the airfield.

The new line was never fully completed, however, for Company I failed to locate its assigned position on the edge of the airfield due to the darkness. The unit finally deployed in the woods in front of the gap in the 5th Marines'

lines, thereby minimizing the danger. That night, as the commanding officer admitted. "No Japanese counterattack as such hit our lines, which was, of course, fortunate."²⁰

PROGRESS TO THE SOUTH²¹

The 7th Marines, commanded by Colonel Herman H. Hanneken, landed over Beach Orange 3 in column of battalions. The 3d Battalion (Major E. Hunter Hurst) landed at H-Hour, with the 1st following immediately, while the 2d was to remain afloat as division reserve. To carry out their mission more efficiently, the two assaulting battalions made use of an unusual command structure:

During the landing and initial operations ashore, Company A was attached to 3/7; to revert to control of CO 1/7 upon his landing. Company A had the mission of advancing south in the left half of 1/7 zone of action. This maneuver was to provide initial flank protection for 3/7 as it was advancing eastward. The support company of 3/7 was attached to CO 1/7 for the landing and reverted to CO 3/7 upon landing.²²

²⁰ Maj John A. Crown ltr to CMC, dtd 13 Feb50, in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Crown ltr*.

²¹ Additional sources consulted for this section are: 7th Mar R-2 Jnl, 15Sep-17Oct44, n.d., hereafter *7th Mar R-2 Jnl*, with appropriate date; 1/7 Combined Bn 2-3 Jnls, 15 Sep-17Oct44, n.d., hereafter *1/7 Bn 2-3 Jnls*, with appropriate date; 1/7 HistRpt, 15Sep-30Oct44, n.d., hereafter *1/7 HistRpt*, with appropriate date; 2/7 WarD, 25Aug-26Oct44, n.d., hereafter *2/7 WarD*, with appropriate date; 3/7 WarD, 24Aug-30Oct44, dtd 18Nov 44, hereafter *3/7 WarD*, with appropriate date; 3/5 Rpt of Ops, 15Sep44.

²² LtCol John J. Gormley ltr to CMC, dtd 3Nov49, in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Gormley ltr I*. "It is believed that the decision

Exposed as it was on the extreme right flank, the 7th Marines was subjected to heavy antiboat, mortar, and machine gun fire from Japanese weapons sited on the southwest promontory and the small unnamed islet nearby,²³ as well as to the artillery and mortar fire that was falling along the entire landing front. Both "natural and man-made obstacles on the reef necessitated [an] approach to the beach in column rather than normal wave formation"²⁴ and, as explained earlier, approximately half of the lead battalion landed to the left of its assigned beach in 3/5's landing area.

Despite the resultant confusion and dispersion, 3/7 quickly reunited and attacked inland with Company I on the left and K on the right. Fortunately, the battalion had encountered fewer than 30 live Japanese still on the beach, and these were so dazed from the preparatory fires that they were disposed of quickly by the assault troops as they pushed inland. Although mines, barbed

made during the planning phase to have LT [Landing Team] 1/7 and LT 3/7 swap a company was a wise one and that much time was saved during the early part of the attack since LT 1/7, landing in column behind LT 3/7, did not have to pass through the beachhead line of another unit." *3/7 WarD*, 15Sep44.

²³ "While the Naval Gunfire Support plan was under discussion, I strongly urged heavy caliber fire on the unnamed island just south of Orange 3, both in the prelanding and assault phases. This island was a 'natural' for enfilading the reef and Orange Beaches. During the ship-to-shore move I did not see a single indication of friendly fire on this target." *Harris ltr*.

²⁴ LtCol John J. Gormley ltr to CMC, dtd 27Feb50, in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter cited as *Gormley ltr II*.

wire entanglements, and spotty resistance from enemy soldiers in mutually supporting pillboxes and trenches hindered the advance, the Marines obtained unexpected help from one enemy obstacle, a large antitank trench just inland of Beach Orange 3. Spotted early that morning by an air observer, its existence was radioed to the staff of 3/7 just prior to landing. According to Major Hurst, the trench simplified the reorganization problem:

Once officers were able to orient themselves, it (the antitank ditch) proved an excellent artery for moving troops into the proper position for deployment and advance inland since it crossed the entire width of our zone of action approximately parallel to the beach. With respect to the battalion CP, I am convinced that it enabled us to join the two principal echelons of CP personnel and commence functioning as a complete unit at least an hour earlier than would otherwise have been possible.²⁵

By 0925, 3/7 had seized its beachhead at a cost of 40 Marine casualties and, with two companies in assault, the battalion was moving rapidly inland against resistance described as moderate. In little over an hour, the front had advanced some 500 yards farther east into the island's interior, and Company K reported the capture of an enemy radio direction tower. Early in the afternoon, however, Company I came up against a well organized defense "built around a large blockhouse, the concrete ruins of a barracks area, several pillboxes, concrete gun emplacements and mutually supporting gun positions."²⁶

²⁵ LtCol E. Hunter Hurst ltr to DirMCHist, dtd 23Nov49, in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Hurst ltr. I*.

²⁶ 3/7 WarD, 15Sep44.

To prevent needless casualties, the Marines were halted pending the arrival of the landing team's tanks which had been briefed for this particular mission.

As the Shermans moved up, making a wide sweep around the antitank trench, they chanced upon some Marines working their way along the southern fringe of the airfield. When the troops identified themselves as being of Company I, the tank commander attached his Shermans to this group of Marines and operated with them for some time before discovering that they were from 3/5's Company I instead of 3/7's Company I. All this time, of course, Hurst's battalion had been held up, awaiting the arrival of the tanks. Accordingly, 3/7's "time schedule, which had worked perfectly up to that point," explained the commanding officer, "was thrown completely off by the delay entailed, and I believe that to be principally responsible for our not reaching the east beach on the first day."²⁷

While waiting for the Shermans to arrive and reduce the obstructions to its advance, Company I of 3/7 lost all contact with 3/5's Company K on the left flank. Accordingly, Major Hurst placed Company L, which had landed with 1/7, in a reserve position behind Company I and echeloned it toward the left rear to safeguard that flank and to allow the attack to continue. Patrols from Company L were dispatched to

²⁷ *Hurst ltr I*. "Incidentally, this incident is one of many which reflect on the lack of training prior to Peleliu. With adequate tank-infantry training behind us, the tank personnel would have known to which I Co they had attached themselves." *Ibid*.

the north in search of the adjoining regiment's right flank unit, but the foremost patrol emerged upon the airfields hundreds of yards in the rear of the unit it was attempting to locate.

The 1st Battalion (Lieutenant Colonel John J. Gormley), meanwhile, had landed but suffered from the same anti-boat fire and underwater obstacles that had scattered the lead battalion. As a result, some of 1/7's men ended up on Orange 2. Once ashore, the 1st quickly regrouped and began clearing the beach. Its zone of action was on the extreme right of the division landing, that portion of the beach which Company A of 1/7 had seized earlier when landing attached to 3/7. This company, after rejoining its parent unit, attacked directly east on the left, while Company C advanced southward on the right, and Company B remained in reserve. Until about noon, the resistance to the battalion's advance was described as light, although heavy mortar fire was received.

Immediately after moving off the beach, the Marines ran into a thick mangrove swamp which extended across a large portion of 1/7's front. When Marines of Company C tried to make their way along the only path skirting the western (right) edge of the watery obstacle, they received heavy machine gun and rifle fire from Japanese entrenched in pillboxes constructed out of large pieces of coral. As a result, their progress was seriously hindered. Company A, on the other hand, had worked its way around the eastern fringe of the swamp only to find itself some 250 yards within 3/7's zone of action. Lieutenant Colonel Gormley or-

dered the reserve company up to tie in between the assaulting companies, as the heavy fighting which had begun about noon continued.

Since the 7th Marines had failed to keep on schedule, all of its elements pushed on as rapidly as possible in the gathering dusk. Not until 1715 did the frontline units receive orders to dig in for the night. No sooner did the Marines attempt to tie in their lines, than the enemy began executing a forward movement by means of light machine gun teams operating in mutual support. Lateral movement along the front became difficult and the Marines were forced to organize only hasty defensive positions.

Although several localized counterattacks were launched against the 7th Marines' lines during the hours of darkness, only one posed any real danger. Company C was hit at approximately 0200, when a strong Japanese force swarmed out of the swamp and attacked the Marines' night defenses. Some enemy troops even succeeded in penetrating the forward positions, whereupon a number of beach party personnel were pressed into service as a mobile reserve. During the four hours of fighting, the Marines inflicted some 50 casualties upon the attackers before the Japanese broke off the action.²⁸

²⁸ *Gormley ltr I*. "It is my recollection that the Reconnaissance Co. was deployed just behind 1/7 on the night of D Day. . . . During the night a runner supposedly from 1/7 CP contacted men with orders to move forward and plug up the lines which were being breached by the enemy. . . . The Second Platoon then moved forward under fire and took its place in a gap about 40 yards . . . [and]

JAPANESE COUNTERATTACKS²⁹

It was not until late afternoon of D-Day that the Japanese, whose failure to seize tactical advantage from the fluid situation was puzzling, made their major bid to drive the invaders into the sea, but by then it was too late. The Marines had already established a beachhead and had made preparations to frustrate any bold attempt by the enemy to smash through to the vital supply dumps and unloading areas.

First warning of the Japanese intentions came about 1625, when particularly heavy enemy artillery and mortar fire began falling on Marine positions. Then, at 1650, Japanese infantry in estimated company-strength appeared on the northern edge of the airfield and began advancing across it. To Marines hoping for a massive *banzai* charge to facilitate their task of wiping out enemy resistance, the cool professional way in which these enemy soldiers negotiated the open area, taking maximum advantage of every dip and shell hole in the terrain over which they passed, was disappointing.

A large number of Japanese tanks, meanwhile, was forming up behind the protective shield of the ridges to the north of the airfield. They debouched in two columns upon the open terrain about 600 yards to the left front of 1/5 in full view of the Marines. After

skirting the northern fringe where the jungle growth gave some scant cover, the enemy tanks swung out "in what can best be described as two echelon formation [and] headed for the center of the 1st Battalion. About half of the enemy tanks had from eight to a dozen Japanese soldiers riding (tied) on the outside of the tanks."³⁰

These light tanks, really tankettes by American standards,³¹ soon came abreast the infantry advancing in dispersed formation across the open airfield and quickly left them far behind. The Japanese tank commander employed his only sound tactic, which was racing straight ahead at full throttle for the Marine lines. If the tank officers had attempted to coordinate their attack with the slower moving infantry, not one of the enemy tanks would have gained the Marine lines, for many of the organic weapons of a rifle battalion could have knocked them out.

Fortunately for the Marines, the place where this tank/infantry attack was aimed, the junction between the 1st and 5th Marines in the woods southwest of the airfield, was held by the units best organized to withstand a determined thrust of this type. Colonel Harris, knowing that the forward elements of his 5th Marines would end up facing the level terrain where conditions were ideal for tank maneuvers, had ordered

accounted for at least 30 of the enemy killed during the night." 1stLt Robert L. Powell, Jr., ltr to CMC, n.d., in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Powell ltr*.

²⁹ Additional sources used for this section are: *5th Mar OpRpt*, 15Sep44; *1/5 B-3 Jnl*, 15Sep44; *2/5 OpRpt*; *3/5 Rpt of Ops*, 15Sep44; *2/11 SAR*; Boyd, *1/5 PalauOp*.

³⁰ Boyd, *1/5 PalauOp*, p. 16.

³¹ The Marine tank commander on Peleliu described the Japanese light tanks as merely "light reconnaissance vehicles" possessing "only ¼" to ⅜" armor," and stated that these "tankettes were not worthy of the name tank and were doomed to certain destruction in any heavy action." *Stuart ltr*.

that heavy machine guns and 37mm antitank guns be unloaded with the assault troops and set up on phase line 0-1 as soon as this initial objective was seized. It was for this reason that Lieutenant Colonel Boyd had placed the three Shermans attached to his 1st Battalion in hull defilade when further advance did not seem likely. Although the Americans had exact intelligence as to the number of enemy tanks and expected some form of violent reaction from the Japanese during the day, the sudden appearance of the tanks on the airfield and the speed of their charge towards the Marine lines caused some surprise.

The course of the enemy tank attack ran diagonally across the front of 2/1, whose men opened up with every weapon they had. Two of the tanks suddenly veered right and crashed into the battalion's lines. Some 50 yards inside, the tanks hurled over an embankment and landed in a bog. When the Japanese attempted to escape their mired vehicles, nearby infantrymen quickly dispatched them.

Although all except one of 2/1's attached Shermans had returned to the beach to rearm, they only had to move some 50 yards to gain a clear field of fire and to engage the enemy tanks.³² Once the Marines opened fire, the dust became so dense that sighting by the Shermans was possible only between the dust clouds, which slowed down their rate of fire. The first few rounds had been armor-piercing, but these shells,

to the Marines' dismay, passed completely through the thin hulls of the Japanese light tanks to detonate harmlessly on the ground. After the gunners switched to high explosive ammunition, however, the effect of the Shermans' fire was devastating.

Other Marine tanks working through the woods on the southern side of the airfield with advance elements of 2/5, meanwhile, spotted the enemy armor early and "moved out on the airstrip and were shooting as soon as the first Jap tank touched the other side of the airport."³³ The part that these Shermans played in the following action was witnessed by Lieutenant Colonel Walt from an advantageous position just right of the 1/5 lines:

... four Sherman tanks came onto the field in the 2/5 zone of action on the south end of the airfield and opened fire immediately on the enemy tanks. These four tanks played an important role in stopping the enemy tanks and also stopping the supporting infantry, the majority of which started beating a hasty retreat when these Shermans came charging down from the south. They fought a running battle and ended up in the midst of the enemy tanks.³⁴

Men of 1/5, meanwhile, opened up with their 37mm's and heavy machine guns, while their immobile Shermans added cannon fire. Just inside the battalion's front lines were set up the only artillery pieces ready to function at this time. Battery E of 2/11 began firing

³² Capt Robert E. Brant ltr to CMC, dtd 9Feb50, in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Brant ltr*. "... the tank commanders were adjusting fires from their turrets just as if they were on a gunnery range." *Ibid*.

³³ Maj Jack R. Munday ltr to CMC, dtd 13Mar50, in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Munday ltr*.

³⁴ LtCol Lewis W. Walt ltr to CMC, dtd 25Mar50, in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Walt ltr*.

at maximum rate as soon as the Japanese tanks appeared on the airfield. Once the enemy vehicles came within range, Marines employing bazookas and grenade launchers took them under fire. Overhead, a Navy dive bomber swooped down to plant a 500-pound bomb right in the midst of the onrushing enemy tanks, adding air power's destructive capability to the holocaust already engulfing the counterattack from every available Marine weapon in range.

Under the weight of this combined fire, the tank-infantry charge quickly began melting away. Some of the tanks exploded, spreading flaming fragments far and wide, while the hitchhiking soldiers just seemed to disintegrate. Not all of the Japanese tanks were knocked out, however, and these survivors smashed into the front lines of 1/5. Penetrating far to the rear past startled Marines, these tanks created confusion and dismay among the beachhead defenders.

As the commanding officer of 1/5 described the scene, these tanks "were running around wildly, apparently without coordination, within our lines firing their 37mm guns with the riders on those tanks carrying external passengers yelling and firing rifles."³⁵ One Japanese vehicle headed straight for the firing howitzers in an attempt to overrun them. A Battery E gunner hit the tank with the first round of direct fire, stopping it in its tracks, and a bazooka team finished the job. Another tank nearly reached the beach before firepower from rear area troops knocked it out. Marines in frontline positions,

however, did not panic. Once the enemy vehicles passed them, they remained in place, ready to engage the following Japanese infantrymen.

When the smoke of battle cleared, no enemy riflemen were in sight. They had either been destroyed by the overwhelming firepower brought to bear upon them or preferred to retreat in the face of it. Two Marines were found crushed to death by enemy tanks and a few other men had been wounded by flying fragments of exploding tanks. One Sherman had even suffered three hits by bazookas, indicative of the confusion caused by the counterattack. The commanding officer of the 1st Tank Battalion, however, thought that the swift collapse of the tank-infantry counterattack was "no grounds for smugness in regard to our antitank prowess. Had the Japanese possessed modern tanks instead of tankettes and had they attacked in greater numbers the situation would have been critical."³⁶

What actually happened during those few brief minutes of furious combat has remained cloudy and unclarified down to the present. For example, if all the claims of individual Marines were accepted, the total of Japanese tanks destroyed that day would be several times higher than what the enemy garrison had on Peleliu. Even the number of tanks engaged in the charge is in doubt, and those destroyed were so fragmentized and riddled by marks of various Marine weapons that no accurate count could be made or credit definitely granted to the weapon responsible for

³⁵ Boyd, *1/5 PalauOp*, p. 16.

³⁶ *Stuart ltr.*



AFTERMATH of enemy tank attack on Peleliu airfield. (USMC 95921)



.30 CALIBER MACHINE GUN in action on Peleliu. (USMC 95248)

the vehicle's demise. Apparently, two of the Japanese light tanks escaped, leaving 11 as the number destroyed.³⁷

Although foiled in their major attempt to annihilate the invaders, the Japanese did not lose heart. During the rest of the day and night, they pressed against the Marine lines, attempted to infiltrate these positions, and launched numerous localized counterattacks. The next major threat came about 1750, when two Japanese light tanks, this time coordinating their movement with supporting infantry, started across the northern runway, aimed as before at the junction between the 1st and 5th Marines. The heavier weapons of the Marine division quickly dispatched the two tanks, while the approaching soldiers were cut down or scattered well forward of the front lines by the hurricane of automatic fire unleashed by nearby units. About a half hour later, the enemy engaged the Marines at the junction of 1/5 and 2/5 in a fire fight which soon faded out. The next morning in a pre-dawn attack, two more Japanese light tanks accompanied by a group of soldiers attempted an attack upon 1/5's lines, but without any success.

Throughout the hours of darkness, the use of star shells and 60mm mortar illuminating ammunition precluded any surprise movements by the Japanese, while those artillery pieces already ashore kept up harassing fires to prevent regrouping of the enemy's forces. Probably because of this, no major counterattack developed on the extreme left flank of the division to exploit the

precarious situation there. The small band of Marines isolated on the Point, however, was reduced through attrition by numerous small, but determined, enemy thrusts until only 18 men, relying on a single captured machine gun, remained to resist a counterattack.

Farther south, Marine units were subjected to infiltration tactics and minor counterattacks by a determined foe throughout the night, but 2/1 and 1/5 were tied in on phase line 0-1. Except for the difficulties of 3/5 and the two assault battalions of the 7th Marines in locating each other and establishing contact, the situation appeared to be in good shape. Before halting for the night, 2/5 had surged half way across the open airfield to make the biggest gain of any Marine battalion for the day. The advance in the southern portion of the island, although nowhere near the optimistic goals set by the division commander, had opened up much-needed space for the emplacing of artillery and the locating of inland supply dumps to relieve some of the beach congestion.

SUPPORT OPERATIONS³⁸

While assault Marines aggressively expanded the shallow beachhead, other

³⁷ *5th Mar OpRpt*, 15Sep44; *1/5 B-3 Jnl*, 15Sep44; *Walt ltr*.

³⁸ Additional sources consulted for this section are: *2d MAW UHist*; *MAG-11 UHist*; *MAG-11 Palau Rpt*; 11th Mar *OpRpt*, dtd 10Nov44, hereafter *11th Mar OpRpt*; *5th Mar OpRpt*; 5th Mar *Rpt on Sup and Evac*, n.d., hereafter *5th Mar Sup-Evac-Rpt*; QM, 5th Mar *Rpt on Sup, PeleliuOp*, dtd 4/Oct44, hereafter *5th Mar SupRpt*; *3/5 Rpt of Ops*; 8th Amphibian *TractorBn, IIIAC, OpRpt*, dtd 30Oct 44, hereafter *8th Amphibian TractorBn OpRpt*; LtCol W. A. Bean, Canadian Army, Observer's Report—Palau, dtd 31Oct44, hereafter Bean, *Observer's Rpt—Palau*.

members of the task force labored strenuously to organize the beach area and to maintain a steady stream of vital supplies moving shoreward and inland. On the whole, this essential job was performed well, despite the enemy's heavy artillery, mortar, and machine gun fire upon the beaches. Although the shore party suffered twice the number of casualties on Peleliu than had been the case in any previous 1st Marine Division operation, such losses "did not affect the constant unloading of supplies."³⁹

The decision to create a waterborne supply dump by means of floating barges proved to be "an excellent solution to an extremely important problem . . . and enabled the force ashore to get along on a minimum margin of supply and also avoided congesting the beach with large quantities of supplies before it was prepared for their reception."⁴⁰ Another example of good foresight was the use of large numbers of amphibian trailers, which succeeded in staving "off a threatened shortage of artillery and machine gun ammunition until unloading could be resumed at dawn on Dog plus One."⁴¹

The unloading of mechanized equipment proceeded on schedule so that by late afternoon, most of the cranes and bulldozers were in operation. Some of the shore party's labor forces, however, did not arrive at their assigned locations until the morning after D-Day owing to the lack of LVTs and DUKWs to

transport them. The intense enemy fire took its toll of the advancing amphibian waves and "resulted in a continuous shortage of amphibious vehicles into which to transfer boat waves, and these waves hit the beach further and further behind schedule."⁴²

This unfortunate situation was intensified by the fact that damaged LVTs were being dispatched to a repair ship which was already loaded to capacity with other amphibians in need of repair, thereby forcing these LVTs to mill about until they could be taken aboard. "Unnecessary wear and tear on damaged tractors resulted. In addition, as many as four (4) LVTs were towing other LVTs, thereby taking out of service from the beach badly needed tractors."⁴³ When it was discovered that it was possible to bring LCVPs over the reef to the beach at high tide, the situation was alleviated somewhat.

Participating actively in the logistic effort were the forward ground echelons of MAG-11's squadrons. Previously organized working parties operated small boat platoons for the unloading of equipment and evacuating of the wounded, while other Marines served as stretcher bearers, ammunition carriers, and even riflemen and grenade throwers on the front lines. Moreover, some 50 men from VMF(N)-541 landed in a group and manned a second line of defense against Japanese infiltration of the 7th Marines' mortar positions.

³⁹ 1st MarDiv SAR, Phase II, Part I to Anx C, p. 2.

⁴⁰ Bean, *Observer's Rpt—Palau*, p. 13.

⁴¹ 1st MarDiv SAR, Phase II, Part I to Anx C, p. 3.

⁴² Bean, *Observer's Rpt—Palau*, p. 11.

⁴³ 8th Amphibian TractorBn, *OpRpt*. "In one case, an LVT with a damaged hull came alongside the repair ship, and not being able to get aboard, sank alongside." *Ibid*.

Ashore, the assault forces were encountering and solving their own logistic headaches. The trials of the 5th Marines, in particular, revealed that complications arise even in the best laid plans. By afternoon, the heavy fighting experienced by 3/5 during its advance across the island had resulted in a critical supply shortage, for almost all the assault companies' rifle and machine gun ammunition had been expended. Replacement of these essential items to the assaulting battalion, however, was hampered seriously by the LVT shortage and the heavy enemy shelling. Japanese observers kept the entire regimental beach under strict surveillance and continually called down artillery and mortar fire whenever amphibian vehicles reached the shore. Even the 5th Marines' assigned amphibian trailers, which were being employed at Peleliu specifically to provide timely replacement of high expenditure-rate ammunition, did not help to alleviate the shortage. These trailers were not received by the regiment until after the initial supply problem had been solved, and even then, all except two were delivered in damaged condition.

Complicating the whole supply situation for the 5th Marines was the early loss of its assigned beach party commander. This naval officer had been wounded almost immediately upon arrival ashore, and his successor fell to a sniper bullet soon after. As a result, the regimental quartermaster was forced to step in and assume this additional responsibility, an unwanted command of which he was not relieved until late in the afternoon. Just one of the many

problems connected with this new task was the mounting number of casualties. Because of the shortage of amphibian vehicles, a speedy evacuation of the wounded was impossible, and the first aid stations on the beaches soon reached the overflowing stage. Too late, the Marine commander learned that the beach party had not marked the regimental beach properly, and when the evacuation LVTs finally arrived, they encountered difficulties in locating their assigned landing points.

The need on the front lines for water, rations, and ammunition, meanwhile, was so great that every available vehicle of the 5th Marines was kept busy hauling these critical items up to the embattled infantrymen. Accordingly, the work of clearing the rest of the regiment's equipment off the beach was hindered, and the unloading areas steadily became further congested. Despite these handicaps, however, the Marines of the 5th managed to surmount these logistic stumbling blocks by one means or another, and the regiment's drive across the enemy-infested island pressed on.

Like the other assault units of the division, the 5th Marines quickly discovered that the water supply contained in the 55-gallon drums, while drinkable, was extremely unpalatable. The oil drums had been improperly steam-scoured and, as a result, the water in them became fouled. Marines also found that those drums which had not been filled flush with the top had rusted in the tropical heat, polluting the water.

At any rate, the lack of a readily available water supply on the coral

island was "one of the most critical items in this operation."⁴⁴ One tank officer jotted down in his notebook that the infantrymen in the front lines on D-Day were begging for water "like dying men."⁴⁵ The enervating heat of Peleliu, when coupled with the island's lack of surface water, caused numerous cases of heat prostration among the attacking troops. Although these men bounced back to full combat effectiveness after a few days aboard ship where water was plentiful, their much-needed presence during the critical assault phase was lost.⁴⁶

By nightfall, most of the 11th Marines' artillery was ashore and its batteries had completed registration firing,⁴⁷ but not before encountering various complications. Some artillery units, finding their assigned firing positions still in enemy hands, had to search for new sites on the crowded beachhead; others, discovering their designated landing beaches too congested and the enemy fire too intense, had to divert

⁴⁴ *Worden ltr.* "Lack of water during the first three days ashore caused scores of men in my battalion (1/7) to become real casualties—unfit to fight, unable to continue . . . as many casualties as enemy fire." *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Munday ltr.*

⁴⁶ Fortunately, this water situation was alleviated somewhat when potable water was discovered by digging shallow holes in the sand near the shore, and the problem vanished completely once the engineers got their distillation units operating on the island.

⁴⁷ "By 1800 the artillery had one and a half Bns [Battalions] of 75mm pack howitzers and one and a third Bns of 105mm howitzers in position, registered and ready to furnish supporting fires." *1st MarDiv D-3 Periodic Rpt*, 15Sep44.

their Marines and equipment to areas more appropriate for getting ashore and setting up to engage the Japanese. Two 105mm howitzer batteries of 3/11 were actually ashore, but still aboard their DUKWs, when ordered back to the LSTs for the night. During the return trip to the ships across the jagged coral reef, the already damaged hulls of three of the DUKWs were further holed, causing them to sink with the loss of all howitzers and equipment aboard. The surviving 105mm's were landed again early the following morning, as was the corps artillery, which had been prevented from landing on D-Day because of the shallow width of the beachhead.

*TWENTY-FOUR HOUR TOE HOLD*⁴⁸

Although General Rupertus remained on board ship during D-Day, his assistant, Brigadier General Oliver P. Smith, went ashore with a skeleton staff as soon as confirmation came that the assault battalions of the 5th Marines held a firm foothold on the beach. Smith arrived on Peleliu about 1130 and set up an advance command post in an antitank ditch a short distance inland from Beach Orange 2. Almost immediately, he made contact with the CPs of the 5th and 7th Marines, as well as with the command ship, but even attempts by radio failed to bring a response from Puller's regiment.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Additional sources used for this section are: *1stMarHist*; *11th Mar OpRpt*; *7th Mar R-2 Jnl*, 15Sep44; *2/7 WarD*, 15Sep44.

⁴⁹ To facilitate communications ashore, the division had been allotted an experimental LVT(A) that had been extensively modified as a mobile radio station. "This vehicle, while not

Earlier, the 1st Marines had suffered the loss of many skilled radio operators and much communications equipment when enemy fire had scored direct hits upon the five LVTs carrying the regimental headquarters ashore. To make matters worse, the CP was no sooner set up ashore when it was hit by a mortar shell that caused further damage and disorganization. Accordingly, neither Puller nor the division had a clear picture of the tactical situation confronting the 1st's assault platoons or of the units' casualties. It was not until late afternoon that Smith was able to talk to Puller by radio, and even then no inkling of the true precariousness of the situation on the division's left flank was gained.

When reports began trickling out to the command ship about the heavy fighting developing ashore, Rupertus' natural concern was over the loss of the initial momentum of the assault. His attention was drawn early to the plight of the 7th Marines, for just after midmorning the division commander learned of the loss by that regiment of 18 LVTs, and shortly before noon he received the 7th Marines' report of "Heavy casualties. Need ammo, reinforcements."⁵⁰ It was, therefore, the failure of the 7th to achieve the speedy conquest of the south rather than the bitter dug-in enemy resistance to the north, which worried the division com-

completely successful, performed a highly useful service for General Smith's Advance CP on D-Day." LtCol Frederick A. Ramsey, Jr., ltr to CMC, dtd 28Feb50, in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Ramsey ltr*.

⁵⁰ 7th Mar R-2 Jnl, 15Sep44.

mander. He knew, moreover, that the 7th Marines had suffered heavy losses.

By noon, Rupertus had ordered that the Division Reconnaissance Company, part of the floating reserve, go ashore for commitment with the 7th Marines.⁵¹ That afternoon, when the situation in the south still had not remedied itself, and after requesting General Smith's and Colonel Hanneken's opinions, Rupertus committed 2/7, the remaining division reserve. Before the BLT could be landed, however, the approach of darkness and the shortage of amphibian vehicles resulted in its being ordered back to the ships. Some of the returning boats failed to locate the Marines' ship in the darkness and spent the entire night searching, while the troops in them remained in cramped quarters. The Marines in two other boats, because of the "confusion caused by conflicting orders,"⁵² were landed by LVTs later in the night. Since neither Smith nor Hanneken really desired the additional combat troops because their arrival would only further congest the already overcrowded beaches, 2/7's inability to land had no decisive effect upon the first day's fighting.

As the day wore on the situation ashore worsened—"it was a pretty grim

⁵¹ "When he committed the Reconnaissance Company it was not, in the CG's [Commanding General] mind, (in my opinion) that it was a unit but that it was a group of individual infantry replacements." *Fields ltr*. "This was an improper use of the Reconnaissance Company, as there later developed several opportunities for employment of this company in the manner for which it had been trained." Smith, *Narrative*, p. 30.

⁵² 2/7 WarD, 15Sep44.

outlook at that time,"⁵³ recalled Rupertus' chief of staff, Colonel John T. Selden—the Marine commander began to express anxiety to be on the scene himself, a desire which was intensified when he learned that General Geiger, corps commander, was already ashore. Colonel Selden and other staff members, fearful that a single enemy round might wipe out the entire top echelon during the perilous journey to the beach, finally prevailed upon Rupertus to remain afloat. Selden insisted, however, that the bulk of the command echelon go ashore.

Upon reaching the transfer line, the command group discovered 2/7's Marines still waiting for amphibian vehicles to transport them across the reef. Because he "decided that superimposing a second staff on General Smith was useless and ridiculous,"⁵⁴ and that what was needed ashore was more combat troops and artillery, Colonel Selden arranged for his party to lie off the transfer line until elements of 2/7 cleared it. When LVTs or DUKWs still had not arrived by darkness, Selden sent off a message to Rupertus stating his intention of returning to the command ship, and then brought his party back.⁵⁵

On D-Day, Rupertus had expected that his assault troops would seize Objective 0-1, which included a 300-yard

penetration behind the northern beaches and all of Peleliu south of the airfield. Then he had hoped to attack across the open runways to capture Objective O-2, which embraced all of the island south of the ridges behind the airfield. Actually, at day's end the Marines had penetrated approximately 300 yards behind the northern beaches, but held only a narrow wedge of terrain across the island behind Beach Orange 3. This shallow beachhead "had cost the division 210 dead (killed in action, died of wounds, missing presumed dead), and 901 wounded in action; total casualties of 1,111, not including combat fatigue and heat prostration cases."⁵⁶

In contrast to the Marine commander's concern over the progress of his assault troops ashore on Peleliu, the Japanese commander's report on the day's fighting glowed with optimism:

. . . by 1000 hours, our forces successfully put the enemy to rout. . . . At 1420 hours, the enemy again attempted to make the perilous landing on the southwestern part of our coastline. The unit in that sector repulsed the daring counter-attack, and put the enemy to rout once more. However in another sector of the coastline near AYAME [Beach Orange 3] the enemy with the aid of several tanks were successful in landing, although they were encountering heavy losses inflicted by our forces. . . . Our tank unit attacked the enemy with such a cat-like spring at dusk, that they were able to inflict heavy damages on the enemy. . . .⁵⁷

⁵³ BGen John T. Selden ltr to HistDiv, HQMC, dtd 26Oct49, in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Selden ltr*.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*.

⁵⁵ "During this period, we had to shift position on more than one occasion due to high velocity guns that were beginning to register too close for comfort." *Selden ltr*.

⁵⁶ Hough, *Assault on Peleliu*, p. 75. "These were very heavy losses and could not have been sustained for very many days in succession without destroying the combat efficiency of the division." Smith, *Narrative*, p. 34.

⁵⁷ *Japanese CenPacOps*, p. 85.

The Drive Inland: 16-22 September¹

THE MORNING AFTER²

The "whiskery, red-eyed, dirty Marines," observed a civilian combat artist on the morning of 16 September, "had spent the night fighting in foxholes filled with stinking swamp water; they were slimy, wet and mean now."³ The intervening hours of darkness had been filled with the roar of artillery and the rattle of automatic weapons as the infantrymen beat back localized counterattacks. From time to time, star shells and flares from the U.S. cruiser *Honolulu*, the six destroyers, and four LCI gunboats remaining in support cast a greenish pallor over the embattled island. Small groups of Japanese, some wearing helmets of dead Marines, infiltrated behind the frontline positions, and furious hand-to-hand struggles oc-

curred in the rear. Three enemy soldiers even made a brief appearance near the division CP before a burst of fire from an alert sentry cut them down.

Under the cover of darkness, shore party and support troops made use of available LVTs and DUKWs to rush ammunition and water up to the front and to evacuate the wounded. In some cases, vital supplies had to be laboriously hand-carried forward so that the morning attack could start on schedule. No new orders were needed. All regiments were to resume the assault and bend every effort to seize the objectives previously assigned (See Map 5).

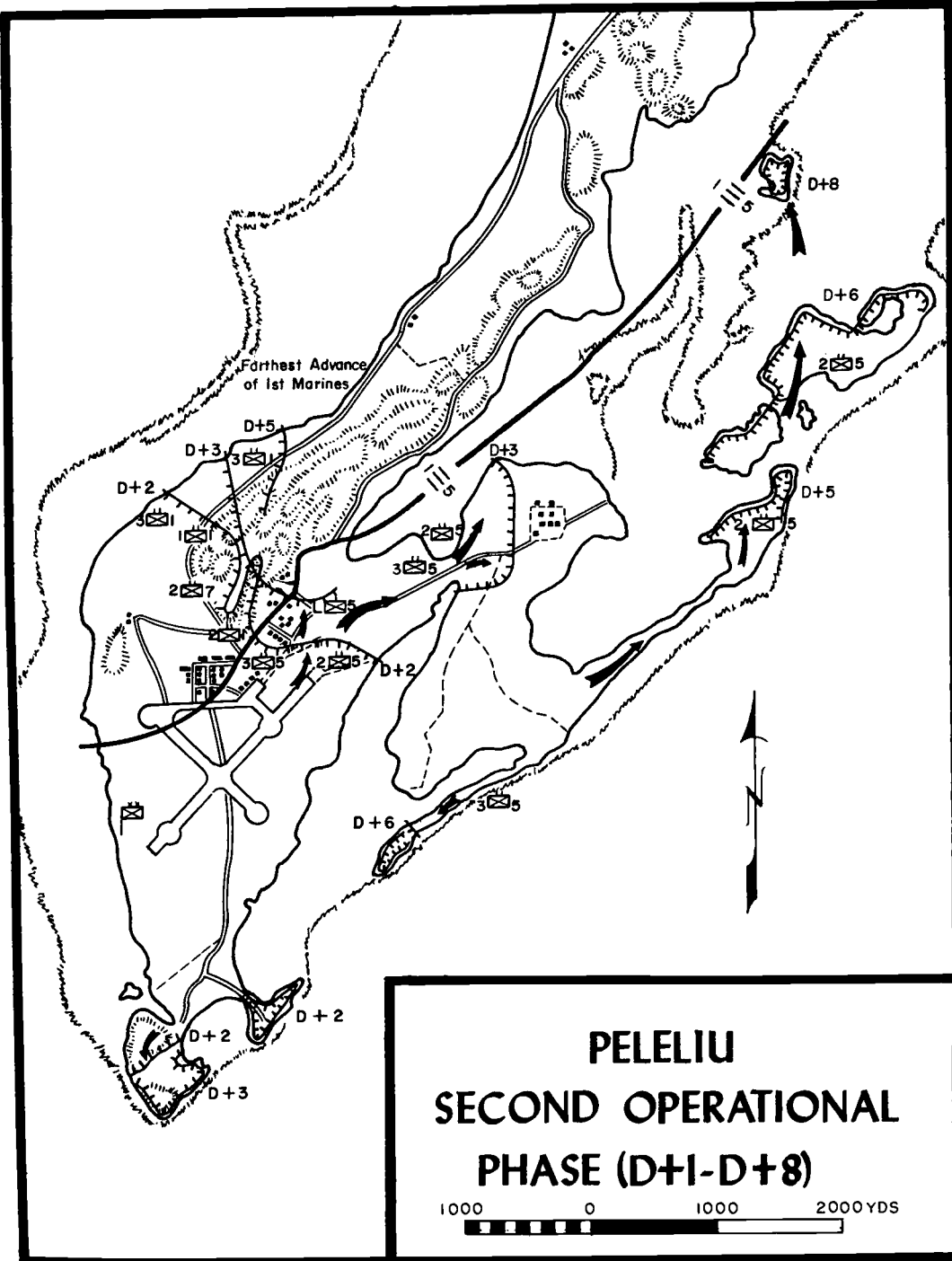
Following a half-hour air and naval gunfire bombardment, the division jumped off along the entire line at 0800. Two hours later, General Rupertus came ashore to assume direct control of the advance. The day turned extremely hot—105 degrees in the shade—and the men, already enervated by their previous day's exertions and their night-long vigil, suffered greatly as they fought exposed to the merciless sun. Canteens quickly emptied, and a rapid resupply proved impossible. As panting men slumped to the ground, often with "tongues so swollen as to make it impossible for them to talk or to swallow,"⁴ the strength of the attacking units deteriorated rapidly.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this chapter is derived from *IIIAC Palaus Rpt*; *1st MarDiv SAR*; *1st MarDiv WarD*, 15-23 Sep44; *1st MarDiv D-2 Jnl*, 15-23Sep44; *1st MarDiv D-3 Periodic Rpt*, 15-23Sep44; *Peleliu Comment File*; *Japanese CenPac Ops*; Smith, *Narrative*; Boyer, *Armd Amphibian Bn*; Hough, *Assault on Peleliu*; Morison, *Leyte*; Smith, *Approach to the Philippines*; Isely and Crowl, *U.S. Marines and Amphibious War*; McMillan, *The Old Breed*.

² Additional sources consulted for this section are: *1st MarDiv POW Interrogation Rpts Peleliu*, 16Sep-16Oct44, hereafter *1st MarDiv POW Interrogation Rpts Peleliu*; Richard, *U.S. Naval Administration*.

³ Tom Lea, *Peleliu Landing* (El Paso: Carl Hertzog, 1945), p. 22.

⁴ Worden *ltr*.



Map 5

E.L. Wilson

The majority of the riflemen, however, continued to advance in swift rushes through a steady rain of enemy artillery, mortar, and machine gun fire to reach the Japanese entrenched in blockhouses, pillboxes, and other fortified positions. Paced by Shermans, the Marines employed flamethrower and demolition charges to eliminate these enemy strongholds or called down supporting arms fire upon particularly difficult fortifications.

On the coral ridges to the north, Puller's 1st Marines ran into bitter dug-in resistance that held down the day's gains. In the center, the 5th Marines cooperated with 2/1 to seize the airfield and to expand east and northeast, while the 7th Marines drove east and south to overrun all of the southern portion of Peleliu except the promontories. Within a few days, both the 5th and 7th Marines accomplished their initial missions and turned their attention northward to aid the hard-pressed 1st, which was finding the going slow over the central ridges.

The second day of the assault, in addition, witnessed two events of some significance: the capture of the first prisoner of war and the official establishment of military government on Peleliu. Members of the naval unit responsible for handling the native population posted the first of ten scheduled proclamations in the name of CinCPOA. To their chagrin, however, not a single Palauan made an appearance, for the Japanese had evacuated them all from the island prior to the landing. Accordingly, the ten men of the military government unit were utilized in various capacities by the Marine division until

their transfer to the Island Command on 7 October. Eventually, 15 natives turned up, but they were promptly dispatched to Angaur where a refugee camp already existed.

The prisoner of war taken on 16 September responded freely to questions. A former fisherman from Koror, this second class private had been inducted in July 1944 and trained along with 500 other men as part of a special counterlanding force; 200 of these soldiers were assigned to Peleliu after completion of the course. Their mission was to swim out and destroy the American landing vehicles and tanks with grenades and mines. The men of this specially-trained force remained holed up in their caves, however—to escape the bombs and shells of naval planes and warships—until the arrival of riflemen of the 1st Marines. Although the prisoner's information proved to be vague and of little military value, he did make one extremely accurate prediction. When asked about the morale of the Peleliu garrison, the Japanese replied, "Though they die, they will defend."⁵

SWEEP TO THE SOUTH⁶

As soon as the scheduled D plus one preparatory fires to its front were lifted, the 7th Marines attacked vigorously. On the left, the 3d Battalion pushed rapidly across the island, while

⁵ Preliminary Interrogation Rpt No. 1, dtd 16Sep44, G-2 Sec, 1st MarDiv, in *1st MarDiv POW Interrogation Rpts Peleliu*.

⁶ Additional sources used for this section are: *7th Mar R-2 Jnl*, 16-18Sep44; *1/7 Bn 2-3 Jnls*, 16-18Sep44; *1/4 HistRpt*, 16-18Sep44; *3/7 WarD*, 16-18Sep44.

the 1st drove south toward the promontories. Bitterly resisting this two-pronged assault was the *3d Battalion, 15th Infantry*, whose veteran troops tenaciously defended their fortified positions till death in true *Bushido* spirit.

Companies K and I advanced directly east, with L following in reserve. First task of the left flank unit, Company K, was to reduce the fortifications that had held up the unit on the previous day. Aided by point-blank fire from the tanks that paced their advance, the infantrymen quickly seized the barracks area and the three gun positions, but the blockhouse proved to be a more difficult problem. Its five-foot thick reinforced concrete walls withstood direct hits from naval gunfire, 75mm tank cannon, and bazookas; even flamethrowers failed, for one-inch armor plates shielded the blockhouse's gun ports and its two underground entrances. Only after demolition teams worked their way forward under the cover of smoke to lay their charges directly against its massive walls and breached this fortification was forward movement resumed.

The 3d Battalion gained the eastern shore by 0925; then, while Company I organized beach positions to defend against any possible enemy reaction and to support the advance by fire, the battalion shifted its assault south toward the promontories. Company K led the way, followed closely by L in reserve. Free use of flamethrowers and bazookas was made, for numerous pillboxes and concrete gun emplacements were encountered. By noon, however, the foremost elements had eliminated the last two pillboxes barring the way to the sandpit leading out to the southeast

promontory. The rifle company, unfortunately, was "unable to continue its advance until a resupply of water could be effected."⁷ The battalion waited in vain until 1500 before the necessary water arrived. By this time, only a few hours of daylight remained, so the battalion was ordered to dig in, postponing the final assault until the following morning.

What daylight remained was used to bring up tanks that destroyed with pointblank fire one blockhouse, two pillboxes, and several machine gun positions guarding the approach to the promontory. Under the cover of this protective fire, a detail of combat engineers ventured forth onto the sandspit to remove or disarm the numerous enemy mines there, paving the way for the scheduled attack the next morning. The Marines manned positions facing their objective during the hours of darkness, but the only enemy opposition consisted of sniper fire in the rear areas.

The 1st Battalion, meanwhile, had been supported in its southward drive by artillery, naval gunfire, and air strikes, as well as by rocket concentrations from the LCIs that paced the Marines' advance along the western shore. The riflemen succeeded in overrunning numerous enemy-held pillboxes and bunkers, in addition to four 5-inch guns and three lighter dual-purpose antiaircraft guns. By noon, the Marines had reached the shore opposite Ngarmoked Island, but their strenuous ex-

⁷ 3/7 WarD, 16Sep44. Colonel Hanneken received the following message at 1324: "3/7 out of water. Troops having dry heaves." 7th Mar R-2 Jnl, 16Sep44.

ertions in the blazing sun had so dehydrated them that a halt was called until water could be brought up to restore the troops' strength. Sufficient water did not arrive until late afternoon, however, and the order was given to dig in for the night.

During the lull, the battalion regrouped and prepared to resume the attack. Additional engineers were rushed up to clear away Japanese mines on the beaches to the Marines' front, and a 75mm self-propelled half-track and four 37mm antitank guns had been brought up to the battalion by 1530. Later, under the cover of darkness, demolition experts searched the narrow strip of land linking Ngarmoked Island to Peleliu and dug up the enemy mines that could bar the employment of tanks in the morning attack.⁸

At 0730 on 17 September, the 3d Battalion's objective, the southeast promontory, was hit by an air strike, but a scheduled mortar preparation was called off when combat engineers, ranging far in advance of the infantrymen, discovered another extensive minefield in their path. For an hour and a half, Shermans and riflemen provided covering fire while the engineers performed their dangerous task of disarming or removing the deadly Japanese

mines. Then, at 1000, a platoon from Company L, the reserve of the previous day, began working its way across the sandspit in coordination with two tanks. Twenty-six minutes later, a foothold had been seized on the objective, whereupon the remainder of the company was transported over the open stretch of ground in LVTs that provided protection from small arms fire.

After regrouping, Company L immediately attacked. Opposing the advance were Japanese soldiers manning automatic weapon and rifle positions among the coral crevices or entrenched in pillboxes with mutually supporting lanes of fire. The Marines, slowly battling their way forward, recognized that blazing napalm was the most effective method of rooting out the diehard defenders, and a hurried call went throughout the battalion for additional flamethrowers. Once they reached the front and began burning the enemy out, the advance quickened. By 1215, the rifle company had seized enough ground for the siting of weapons to provide supporting fires for 1/7's assault of Ngarmoked Island; an hour later, the 3d Battalion reported the capture of the entire southeastern promontory.

The two-day struggle southward cost the Marine battalion 7 dead and 20 wounded. In contrast, the last-ditch stand by the isolated Japanese resulted in 441 enemy killed. The startling discrepancy between these two casualty figures clearly demonstrated the outstanding success and superb skill with which the highly-trained Marines employed small unit assault tactics against stubbornly-defended fortified positions.

⁸ "During the night of D plus 1 many Japs were annihilated while attempting to cross from the southwestern promontory to the unnamed island during low tide. Mortar illuminating shells provided excellent observation of this movement by our troops and the Japs were easy targets for our machine gun and rifle fire." *Gormley ltr I*.

Success, however, did not come so quickly for the 1st Battalion in its final assault on Ngarmoked Island, the southwestern promontory. Early on the 17th, a platoon from Company B, the battalion reserve of the previous day that now held assault positions opposite the objective, moved out in the wake of naval gunfire and mortar fire to gain the far end of the causeway. Here, the onrushing riflemen and their supporting tanks ran head-on into heavily-fortified positions, and the attack ground to an abrupt halt. After an hour of stubborn fighting failed to expand the bridgehead, Colonel Hanneken approved a withdrawal to give the supporting arms a chance to pulverize the enemy fortifications holding up the advance.

While naval gunfire, artillery, and mortars hammered the objective, preparations to resume the attack were made. All available tanks, LVT(A)s, half-tracks, and 37mm guns were dispatched forward. By early afternoon, the successful completion of 3/7's mission permitted Major E. Hunter Hurst to release his tank and weapons support for use by Lieutenant Colonel John J. Gormley's 1st Battalion. Company B, which had been badly mauled by enemy fire that raked the causeway, was replaced in the frontlines by Company A, which jumped off at 1430 following a 10-minute air strike.

In short order, the Marines, now supported by three tanks, broke through the battered Japanese positions and began fighting their way southward. An hour later, Company I moved into reserve behind 1/7, releasing Company C, which crossed over to the promon-

tory and joined the attack on A's right. Shortly thereafter, Company B also moved to Ngarmoked Island and took up reserve positions immediately behind the two assault units that were pressing the attack with vigor. A measure of revenge was granted the fast moving Marines, for they finally succeeded in knocking out the high velocity guns that had enfiladed the Orange beaches for so long. When darkness halted the day's advance, the two rifle companies had a firm hold on both the eastern and western shores and a defensive line running almost halfway across the promontory.

The next day, 18 September, the resumption of the attack was delayed until 1000 to permit a more thorough preparation. Marine artillery blanketed the enemy-held part of Ngarmoked Island, while riflemen, with their armor and supporting weapons, carefully deployed into the most advantageous jump-off positions. Just to the front loomed a sizeable swamp, approximately in the center of the promontory. Company A attacked to the left of this impassable terrain, Company C to the right, with both units reestablishing contact on the opposite side. Company B had the task of seizing a piece of land that protruded from the eastern shore just in front of the line of departure.

Attacking units were instructed to leave bypassed Japanese for later destruction by demolition teams, but Company C was early treated to an example of the enemy's tactics of passive infiltration, *i.e.*, allowing positions to be overrun in order to be in the rear of the

American attacking force. During the advance south around the swamp, 15 riflemen were detailed to remain behind to guard suspected cave openings and pillboxes where Japanese might still be lurking. No sooner had the front lines surged forward than a large number of enemy soldiers suddenly emerged from their concealed holes and took the small Marine detachment under fire. The situation became so critical that both the Division Reconnaissance Company, attached to the regiment since D-Day, and most of Company I had to be committed to maintain control of the bypassed areas.

By 1344, the two attacking rifle companies of the 1st Battalion had seized the southern shore of Ngarmoked Island. Company B, on the other hand, had experienced tougher going; its assault squads, attacking towards the eastern shore, ran squarely into the extensive fortifications that the Japanese had prepared to prevent any penetration into the cove between the two promontories. The advancing Marines continued a yard by yard conquest of the dug-in positions, which seemed to be crowded literally on top of each other. At 1354 the attack stalled, after the Shermans had withdrawn to rearm and the half-tracks had become bogged down in the miry ground. By this time, the company had killed an estimated 350 enemy soldiers and had restricted the pocket of resistance to an area of some 50 square yards.

While waiting for a bulldozer to arrive, Marines in the frontlines could hear the sound of shots, as some of their opponents, faced with the inevitable choice of death or surrender, chose to

commit suicide. Other Japanese leaped into the sea and attempted to escape across the tetrahedrons to the southeastern promontory, only to run into 3/7's riflemen, who promptly slew some 60 of them. After the bulldozer extricated the half-tracks, Company B resumed the assault and quickly overran the last remaining defenders, bringing the unit's estimated total of enemy killed that day to 425.

The 7th Marines informed division at 1525 on 18 September that its initial mission on Peleliu was completed. In seizing the southern part of the island, the regiment uncovered much-needed maneuver area and destroyed to the last man an excellently trained and well-equipped Japanese infantry battalion. During its first four days of fighting, the 7th Marines, less its 2d Battalion, accounted for an estimated 2,609 enemy dead. The fierce determination of the Japanese was reflected by the fact that not a single one was taken prisoner. In accomplishing its mission, the regiment suffered 47 killed, 414 wounded, and 36 missing in action. The disproportionate number of Marine casualties to enemy dead was surprising, for the four-day long assault had constantly pitted exposed Marines against entrenched Japanese in strongly fortified positions. Using proven small-unit assault tactics and making full utilization of all supporting arms, especially demolitions and flamethrowers, the Marines succeeded in annihilating the enemy garrison. Only a unit like the 1st Division, containing a sizable number of veteran troops who had been tested in battle, could have executed such a mission with a minimum of casualties.

ACROSS THE AIRFIELD AND UP THE PENINSULA⁹

The first task confronting the 5th Marines as 16 September dawned was seizure of the airfield, the primary objective on Peleliu. Fortunately for the battalions, their night positions placed them in an advantageous location for that day's advance which was to be a turning movement northward, using the extreme left flank of the division as a pivot point. On the left was the 1st Battalion strung out along the woods' edge. The 2d was deployed in the middle about halfway across the open terrain, and the 3d was on the right at the southern fringe of the airfield.

With the coming of daylight, the enemy laid down an intense shelling upon these frontlines. One Japanese shell landed directly on the regimental CP, and another one destroyed vital communications equipment. Several staff officers became casualties, and Colonel Harris' knee was severely injured, making it extremely difficult for him to move about. Division rushed replacements to staff the 5th's CP adequately, which allowed the regiment to jump off on schedule.

At 0800, the 1st Battalion moved out of the woods onto the open runways with two companies in assault, the other in reserve and echeloned to the left rear. Although a few riflemen benefited somewhat from the cover provided by

the scrub growth and rubble along the northern fringe of the airfield, most had to brave the open runways in an open order formation with intervals of about 20 yards. "The advance of the assault companies across the fireswept airfield," reminisced the battalion commander, "was an inspiring and never to be forgotten sight."¹⁰ Despite heavy casualties, the Marines surged across the exposed runways to reach the main hangar area on the northeast side of the airfield in little more than an hour.

Here, the leading troops encountered stiff resistance from enemy soldiers entrenched among the ruins of the buildings, a large V-shaped antitank ditch, and two stone revetments that housed 20mm guns. As large numbers of the attackers became casualties, the advance faltered, for the Marines' strength had been severely weakened by numerous heat exhaustion cases. When LVTs attempted to evacuate the wounded, they attracted such a deadly rain of fire from Japanese guns emplaced in the commanding ground north of the airfield that Shermans had to run interference for the thin-skinned amphibian vehicles.

A platoon moving in defilade of a Marine tank finally managed to outflank the enemy positions holding up the attack, and, once the reserve company was committed, a vigorous assault overran the Japanese defenders in the hangar area after some furious hand-to-hand fighting. Pushing on, the 1st Battalion gained phase line 0-2 before dark, but Japanese gunners on nearby ridges unleashed such an intense and

⁹ Additional sources used for this section are: *5th Mar OpRpt*, 16-23Sep44; *1/5 B-3 Jnl*, 16-23Sep44; *2/5 OpRpt*, 16-23Sep44; *3/5 Rpt of Ops*, 16-23Sep44; *5th War Dog Plat IIIAC*, Peleliu *OpRpt*, 16Sep-18Oct44, dtd 17Nov44, hereafter *5th War Dog Plat Peleliu OpRpt*; Boyd, *1/5 PalauOp*.

¹⁰ Boyd, *1/3 PalauOp*, p. 19.



75MM GUN in firing position on Peleliu. (USMC 95050)



1st MARINE DIVISION tanks at Peleliu airfield. (USMC 94876)

accurate fire upon the exposed infantrymen that the decision was made to withdraw to the antitank ditch to set up night defenses.

The 2d Battalion spent the day fighting its way up the east side of the airfield through an almost impassable scrub jungle that degenerated into a thick mangrove swamp along the eastern shore. Supporting Shermans could operate only along the fringe of the woods, and the riflemen had to plunge alone into the thicket infested by enemy soldiers, who often had to be ousted in close combat. When darkness began closing in, the Marines tied in with 1/5 on the left flank and fell back a short distance on the open airfield in order to have clear fields of fire to their front.

On the extreme right, the 3d Battalion soon found itself in an unusual predicament as the attack progressed. Company I started the day in reserve, but was shifted northward about noon and used to cover a threatening gap that developed between assault units of the 1st Marines. Company L, meanwhile, remained tied in with 2/5's drive northeastward, while Company K renewed its eastern advance on the left flank of 3/7. As a result, the 3d Battalion's two rifle companies had to overextend themselves to retain contact as they assaulted in different directions. About 1500, Major John H. Gustafson, formerly executive officer of 2/5, replaced Lieutenant Colonel Walt as battalion commander. Walt promptly returned to the 5th's CP and resumed his duties as regimental executive officer, thereby taking some of the load off the injured Colonel Harris. Shortly after this

change in command, the 3d Battalion was ordered to displace forward in preparation for relieving the 1st Battalion the following morning.

Before passing into reserve on 17 September, however, the 1st drove forward against light resistance to regain the previous day's positions on phase line 0-2. During this advance, one of the rifle platoons was subjected to a rocket strike from a carrier plane. This unfortunate incident occurred when the man responsible for removing the panels signalling an earlier air strike "had been evacuated as a casualty and provisions had not been made for someone else to take over his responsibilities."¹¹ After taking over 1/5's zone, the 3d Battalion moved out in coordination with elements of 2/5 on its right, but the heavy flanking fire from the Japanese on the central ridges with their clear fields of fire and excellent observation effectively prevented any real gains that day.

On the right, the 2d Battalion resumed its slow advance through the dense jungle between the airfield and the mangrove swamp. When a Sherman attempted to assist infantrymen working their way through the undergrowth at the edge of the airfield, Japanese observers on the ridges called down such a concentration of artillery and mortar fire upon the tank that it departed to spare the nearby Marines. As the men attempted to maintain a skirmish line while moving through the jungle against the sporadic fire of scattered snipers, the enervating heat caused greater casualties than did the Japanese. Pla-

¹¹ Boyd, *1/5 PalauOp.* p. 25

toon leaders halted their men frequently for rest periods, but the number dropping from heat prostration continued to mount. Day's end, nevertheless, found the battalion some 600 yards beyond phase line 0-2, with one flank anchored on the swamp and the other firmly tied in with 3/5's right flank.

On this day, the Japanese fired a few rockets, possibly of the spin stabilized type, although they had a very erratic corkscrew type of trajectory. These rockets appeared to be about the size of 5-inch shells and were loaded with picric acid. The bright, yellow burst caused brief excitement when a few cries of "Mustard Gas" were raised. Prompt reassurance by radio that it was only explosion of picric acid quelled the excitement.¹²

The next day, 18 September, the 5th Marines' attack on the left ground to a halt by noon, when the 3d Battalion ran into an increasing volume of fire from the same towering central ridges that had prevented any gains the previous day. On the right, in the 2/5 sector, Japanese machine gun and rifle fire from the mangrove swamp on the battalion's east flank made any advance very costly. Artillery and mortar fire had little effect until a call was made for air bursts about 30 feet above the swamp. This proved highly effective and permitted a rapid advance. Jumping off at 0700, 2/5 moved forward rapidly in the face of only scattered resistance, protected from enemy artillery observation by the canopy of tree tops and reached the road leading to the

village of Ngardololok and the northeastern peninsula.

The mangrove-choked waters separating this peninsula from the mainland, however, pressed in so close to the road on both sides as to make the approach virtually a causeway. About 1040, a small patrol ventured across to test enemy reaction. When it returned safely without drawing any fire, an air strike was requested to pave the way for a crossing in force. To the Marines' disappointment, the carrier-based planes missed their target completely, and artillery concentrations had to be called down instead to soften up the Ngardololok area.

At 1335, a reinforced rifle company began crossing over the narrow approach route. Unknown to the battalion commander, the 5th Marines' CP had already ordered a second air strike to rectify the earlier abortive attempt. As the company negotiated the open causeway, U. S. Navy planes suddenly swooped down out of the skies to strafe the exposed troops. The Marines pushed on, despite heavy casualties, and established a firm bridgehead.

As if to compound the 2d Battalion's misfortunes that day, the unit was subjected twice more to misplaced American fire. An artillery concentration hit the battalion in the process of displacing forward, and later, mortar fire struck some elements as they crossed the causeway. Of the 34 casualties suffered by 2/5 on 18 September, almost all resulted from friendly fire.

The 3d Battalion's front, on the 18th, had been pinched down between the ridges and the sea to a size manageable by a single company. Accordingly, the

¹² *Harris ltr.*

other two companies displaced to positions on the right (south) flank of 2/5. By nightfall, the two battalions were dug in facing the Japanese installations at Ngardololok. The reserve 1st Battalion, which had been flushing out snipers in the rear, now moved up to support the next day's drive.

After dive bombers blasted the objective, the 2d Battalion attacked the remains of Ngardololok during the morning of 19 September. Only sporadic fire from scattered holdouts opposed the advance. As the 2d continued its push forward past the ruins, the 3d Battalion drove southward in the wake of artillery and mortar fire against extremely light resistance. In the following days, the 5th Marines systematically mopped up isolated enemy holdouts on the peninsula, which was secured on 21 September, and the off-shore islands, the last of which was seized on the 23d.

During this period of extensive patrolling, war dogs had about their only opportunity for effective use on Peleliu. Brought ashore on D-Day and sent up to the front lines, the dogs became extremely nervous under the constant shelling. Many even attacked their handlers and had to be destroyed. As a result, the dogs were brought back to the rear areas for night security duty at CPs, while their handlers served as stretcher bearers. When the war dogs operated with patrols of the 5th Marines, however, in a role for which they had been trained, their keen scent saved many Marine lives. On 20 September, for example, a Doberman-Pinscher scouting ahead of Company I's point detected an enemy ambush some 75 to 100 yards away. Once the dog alerted

the Marines to their imminent danger, they were able to escape the trap laid by 20-odd Japanese armed with machine guns and other automatic weapons. The fruitful activities of the war dog platoon came to an untimely end when the 5th Marines reached northern Peleliu. An erratic salvo of white phosphorus shells landed in the area occupied by the platoon, and this unfortunate accident marked the end of its activity on the island.¹³

ASSAULT OF THE RIDGES¹⁴

Puller's 1st Marines jumped off in the general attack on the morning of 16 September and began a turning movement northward in coordination with the 5th Marines. The first problem of the 3d Battalion, on the left, was the long coral ridge that had blocked any successful advance on the previous day. It was not until noon, after the last fresh company of the regimental reserve, 1/1, was thrown into the struggle, that the riflemen, supported by two Shermans, were able to surge up the slopes and wrest a large portion of the high ground from the entrenched enemy.

With control of the commanding heights in their hands, the Marines were soon linked up with the survivors of Company K on the Point. These men had been isolated for some 30 hours, although reinforcements, consisting of shore party personnel and stragglers

¹³ *Harris ltr.*

¹⁴ Additional sources used for this section are: *1st Mar Hist*; *1/1 UHist*; *3/1 Rec of Events*, 16-18Sep44; *2/7 WarD*, 15-18Sep44; Capt George P. Hunt, "Point Secured," *Marine Corps Gazette*, v. 29, no. 1 (Jan45), pp. 39-42, hereafter Hunt, "Point Secured."

on the beach, weapons, and supplies had been brought in over the water by an LVT early on the 16th. By nightfall, even though the mission of reaching phase line O-1 had not been accomplished by 3/1, the worst features of the tactical situation confronting the battalion—a frontline dotted with enemy-created wedges, and gaps between its own units—had been rectified.

Coordinating its attack on the right flank with that of 1/5, Honsowetz' 2d Battalion, 1st Marines, moved out in the wake of the preparatory fires across the northwestern portion of the airfield. When the advancing riflemen reached the building area, stiffening resistance from Japanese hiding among the ruins, plus a brief loss of contact with neighboring units, slowed the attack momentarily. Despite heavy casualties, however, the battalion overran the enemy defenders in savage hand-to-hand combat and began fanning out toward phase line O-2. The onrushing troops made good progress at first, but the Japanese bitterly resisted all efforts by the Marines to advance toward the important road junction linking the East and West Roads. Despite a substantial gain, the men halted for the night some distance short of phase line O-2, the West Road.

That night, the enemy made a determined effort to retake the Point regardless of cost. With this strategic elevation once again in their hands, the Japanese could set up their weapons and play havoc with the men, supplies, and vehicles crowded on the White Beaches. The counterattack came at 2200, when an estimated 500 enemy soldiers, following preparatory mortar

and grenade fire, suddenly rushed Company K's positions on the coral outcropping. The defenders opened up with automatic weapons and hurled grenades, while supporting artillery and mortars blasted the terrain to the front.

In spite of this concentrated hail of fire, some 30 Japanese still managed to penetrate the frontlines. These attackers were dispatched in fierce fighting, while other enemy troops, attempting to flank the Point along the water's edge, were rooted out of the coral crevices by Marines employing thermite grenades and automatic weapons. By 0200, the counterattack subsided as swiftly as it had begun. The overwhelming fire superiority of the Marines had decided the issue. The light of dawn, remembered Captain Hunt, revealed 350 "more Japanese dead sprawled before our lines. Their rear units, horribly mutilated by our artillery and mortars, had been lugging a 40mm gun, for it lay in their midst, scarred by shrapnel, an abandoned symbol of their efforts to recapture the Point."¹⁵ That morning, Company K was finally relieved, but it mustered only 78 men out of the 235 that the captain had led ashore on D-Day.

On 17 September, Colonel Puller had to put all three battalions in the line to press the attack, for his regiment had suffered over 1,000 casualties in just two days of battle. The 3d Battalion was on the left, the 1st in the center, and the 2d on the right, while 2/7 was in reserve. The last-mentioned battalion had finally landed the previous day to support its parent unit's drive south, but

¹⁵ Hunt, "Point Secured," p. 42.

had been diverted north instead to support the more hard-pressed 1st Marines in their assault on the ridges.

Lieutenant Colonel Sabol's 3d Battalion pushed steadily ahead against light sniper fire for a gain of 700 yards, and only the danger of overextending itself prevented the battalion from advancing farther up the west coast that day. In the middle, the 1st Battalion's attack ran squarely into a heavily fortified group of mutually-supporting positions consisting of a huge reinforced-concrete blockhouse with four-foot thick walls and 12 pillboxes emplaced nearby. A hurried call to the battleship *Pennsylvania* brought 14-inch armor-piercing and high explosive shells slamming into this unmarred fortification that had somehow escaped the preparatory bombardment of the island. The shells breached the walls, and concussion killed the 20 enemy soldiers inside. Other supporting arms, meanwhile, had eliminated the surrounding pillboxes.

Resuming the advance, Major Raymond G. Davis' 1st Battalion surged forward across the road marking phase line O-2. Here, the terrain began sloping upward as the riflemen approached the foothills of the Umurbrogol Mountains. Since the entrenched foe to its front was pouring down a very heavy volume of fire that inflicted severe casualties, the battalion quickly regrouped and drove straight up the slopes. Aided by tanks, the infantrymen made good use of their bazookas to knock out 35 separate Japanese-infested caves before digging in for the night. Marine positions had been firmly established on the forward slopes of the first series of hills, notwithstanding the enemy commander's claim that this

assault had been "repulsed by our timely firing."¹⁶

During its rapid advance to the right on 17 September, the 2d Battalion gained the distinction of being the first to encounter the Umurbrogol ridges, a misshapen conglomeration of soaring spires, sheer cliffs, and impassable precipices that was to become infamous in the weeks ahead. Some of the problems confronting the 1st Marines in its assault of this high ground were recorded by the regiment's history:

Along its center, the rocky spine was heaved up in a contorted morass of decayed coral, strewn with rubble, crags, ridges and gulches thrown together in a confusing maze. There were no roads, scarcely any trails. The pock-marked surface offered no secure footing even in the few level places. It was impossible to dig in: the best the men could do was pile a little coral or wood debris around their positions. The jagged rock slashed their shoes and clothes, and tore their bodies every time they hit the deck for safety. Casualties were higher for the simple reason it was impossible to get under the ground away from the Japanese mortar barrages. Each blast hurled chunks of coral in all directions, multiplying many times the fragmentation effect of every shell. Into this the enemy dug and tunnelled like moles; and there they stayed to fight to the death.¹⁷

Early in the morning, the 2d Battalion surged forward to overrun the important road junction that the Japanese had defended so bitterly the previous day. Continuing up the East Road that ran along the base of the ridges, the exposed infantrymen came under increasing fire from enemy soldiers en-

¹⁶ *Japanese CenPacOps*, p. 86.

¹⁷ *1st Mar Hist*, pp. 11-12.

trenched on a 200-foot ridge to the left flank. This high ground, called Hill 200, paralleled the road and formed a threatening salient into the battalion's center. From these commanding heights, observers called down accurate artillery and mortar concentrations not only on the 2d Battalion, but also on the troops of the 5th Marines moving across level ground on the extreme right.

Orders came down from regiment for the troops advancing up the East Road to wheel left and take the ridge under assault. As the Marines attacked up the steep slopes, the Japanese unleashed a devastating fire of mortars and machine guns, while mountain guns and dual-purpose artillery pieces suddenly emerged from hidden positions to blast away at pointblank range before disappearing again into caves. Casualties mounted alarmingly, and many of the tanks and LVT(A)s brought up to support the infantry were knocked out by the accurate enemy fire. The Marines grimly continued climbing upward, however, and succeeded in clearing the crest of all defenders by nightfall. The men dug in quickly, for a slightly higher ridge to the west, Hill 210, still remained in the possession of the Japanese, who now brought a heavy and concentrated fire to bear on the newly-won Marine positions.

As this sustained enemy fire continued throughout the night, casualties became so heavy that a company from 2/7, the 1st Marines' reserve battalion, had to be rushed up the hill to bolster the depleted strength of the defenders. An overwhelming Japanese counterattack to retake this vital terrain probably was prevented only by the well-placed

naval salvos on the enemy-held approaches to Hill 200. Elsewhere, however, the alert foe spotted the gap that developed between the 1st and 2d Battalions as they tied in their lines after dark. Infiltrating in force, the Japanese began exploiting their opportunity. Not until another reserve company from 2/7 fought its way forward into positions covering this void in the 1st Marines' line was the enemy finally contained.

During this same night, Colonel Nakagawa displaced his CP farther inland to a cave deep within his prepared final defensive perimeter in the Umurbrogol ridges. Such a move by the enemy commander underscored the tactical importance of the Marines' seizure of Hill 200. This accomplishment of the 2d Battalion removed a dangerous Japanese salient and replaced it with an American one jutting into the enemy-held terrain; the feat also eliminated the heavy flanking fire that had been hampering the progress of 2/1 and the 5th Marines. All that Colonel Nakagawa admitted to his superiors that night, though, was that "under protection of heavy naval gunfire, an enemy unit composed of two tanks and approximately two companies of infantry successfully advanced up to a high spot on the east side of *Nakayama* (Hill 200)."¹⁸

On 18 September, the same day that the 7th Marines finished its seizure of the promontories and the 5th Marines began its sweep up the northeastern peninsula, the 1st Marines returned to its bitterly-contested, yard-by-yard assault on the central ridges. Some of the

¹⁸ *Japanese CenPacOps*, p. 87.

difficulties involved in fighting over this terrain, according to Lieutenant Colonel Spencer S. Berger, whose 2/7 joined the struggle on the Umurbrogols that day, were:

. . . there was no such thing as a continuous attacking line. Elements of the same company, even platoon, were attacking in every direction of the compass, with large gaps in between. When companies were asked for front lines they were apt to give points where the Company Commander knew or thought he had some men. It did not mean that he held a continuous unbroken line across his front. There were countless little salients and countersalients existing.¹⁰

Three days of continuous assault on fortified positions had so depleted Colonel Puller's rifle battalions—the 1st Regiment had suffered 1,236 casualties—that frontline replacements were absolutely essential, if the attack was to continue. To remedy the situation, Puller ordered the supporting units stripped of personnel to fill the gaps in his rifle platoons. Out of the 473 men jumping off in the 3d Battalion's zone on the 18th, for example, 200 were fresh from regimental headquarters. The 1st Pioneer Battalion also sent up 115 men to strengthen the assaults units. Just prior to the morning's attack, the 2d Battalion, 7th Marines relieved 1/1, which then passed into reserve.

The 3d Battalion moved forward on the left between the central ridges and the western coast against only scattered rifle fire, but was held to a day's gain of merely a few hundred yards because of the necessity of remaining tied in with 2/7. This battalion found the going

slow in the center over the rugged coral ridges, where it cooperated with 2/1 in pinching out the enemy-held Hill 210 that jutted into the Marines' lines. The attackers stormed up both sides of this threatening salient, and their determined rushes finally carried the crest.

In 2/1's zone, the Japanese had been subjecting the riflemen on the northern slopes of Hill 200 to severe artillery and mortar fire in addition to savage counterattacks. By 1400, the battalion had withdrawn its men a short distance from its hard-won conquest of the previous day after reporting that its situation was desperate. Puller's reaction was typical. He instructed Lieutenant Colonel Honsowetz to hold at all costs. Marine mortars immediately placed a smoke screen on the hill to obscure Japanese vision, while Company B of 1/1 was ordered forward from its reserve area to assist.

This rifle unit aggressively assaulted the nearby enemy-held ridges in an attempt to divert fire from the sorely-pressed Marines on Hill 200. The closest ridge, Hill 205, was seized with light casualties, but when the riflemen attempted to press the attack toward the next row of commanding heights, they ran into the precipitous coral rampart that marked the perimeter of Colonel Nakagawa's final defensive positions. Unable to scale the almost sheer cliffs in the face of withering fire from Japanese entrenched on high ground both to the front and flanks, Company B was stopped cold. This failure terminated the day's action. On the extreme right of 2/1, meanwhile, some Marines had succeeded in moving along the base of Hill 200 to reach the ruined village of

¹⁰ *Berger ltr.*

Asias and to tie in with the 5th Marines before halting for the night.

This day's assault pushed the 1st Marines' total casualties over the 1,500 mark, but the regiment had straightened its frontline, located the Japanese weakness along the western shore, and discovered the strongpoint of enemy resistance within the Umurbrogols. Puller would order an all-out attack the following morning in hopes of breaching Colonel Nakagawa's defensive positions among the ridges, but the high tide mark of the southern assault had been reached. Henceforth, the Marines were committed to a bitter war of attrition with a fanatical and tenacious foe, who had converted the jumbled coral cliffs, ravines, and precipices of the Umurbrogols into a nearly impregnable fortress.

*CASUALTIES, CORPSMEN, AND CLIMATE*²⁰

To speed evacuation of the wounded during the assault, medical planners arranged for the empty amphibian vehicles to carry casualties on the return trip from the beach to the transfer line. Here, waiting boats finished transporting the injured Marines the rest of the way to the ships. Those LVTs and DUKWs evacuating men to whom minutes meant the difference between life and death made a beeline for the nearest transport still flying the signal flag that indicated empty beds, and then hurried back to the line of transfer to

resume their primary task. So successfully did this humane plan work that wounded Marines were being treated on ships within an hour of the initial landing. An unfortunate drawback, however, was that the unexpectedly large number of casualties right from the start tied up an excessive number of amphibian tractors. As a result, the shortage of LVTs and DUKWs was intensified, and later waves of troops and supplies were delayed in being transported across the reef and onto the beach.

For support of the combat teams, Company A of the 1st Medical Battalion was attached to the 1st Marines, Company B to the 5th, and Company C to the 7th, while a surgical team from Company D was especially assigned to 3/5 for its later Ngesebus operation. These medical companies had come ashore early, but their equipment had been delayed in landing. Not until 21 September were any of them set up and operating with adequate hospital facilities. Prior to this date, the units aided the shore party in collecting and evacuating the wounded, and provided replacements for the RCTs' organic medical personnel, who had suffered severe losses.

Although 40 hospital corpsmen and 96 stretcher bearers accompanied each combat team, the high initial casualty rate quickly revealed a need for more. The stretcher bearers, fortunately, had received actual practice in first aid during the staging period, and they formed a nucleus of trained personnel when rear echelon troops were pressed into service. These men came from all supporting and garrison units for, as the

²⁰ Sources of medical data particularly consulted for this section include: *IIIAC Palaus Rpt*, Encl J, "Medical Report of Palaus Operation"; *1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase II, Anx D, "Medical."



CLOSE FIGHTING at edge of Peleliu airfield. (USMC 95260)



CASUALTY is hoisted aboard amtrac en route to hospital ship off Peleliu. (USMC 94940)

G-1 officer remarked, "I had no difficulty in obtaining volunteers for this important task, so anxious were the 'rear area' men to aid their infantry 'brothers.'"²¹

Over and above the toll exacted by the seemingly ubiquitous enemy fire, there were the many victims of the tropical island itself. "Peleliu is a horrible place,"²² remarked a civilian correspondent, and Marines echoed his sentiments. The blazing sun, stifling heat, jagged coral, rugged terrain, and lack of readily available water all combined to make the island a living hell.

Heat exhaustion cases increased alarmingly as the fighting progressed, and stocks of salt tablets ashore quickly disappeared. Since they "were worth their weight in gold in preventing heat exhaustion,"²³ all salt tablets that the support ships could spare were sent ashore. Although several combat commanders believed that they lost as many men to the enervating heat as to enemy fire, no definite count of such casualties existed.²⁴ The high incidence of heat prostration cases, nevertheless, severely overloaded the limited medical facilities

and incapacitated valuable, trained Marines during the critical assault phase.

Compounding the unpleasantness of Peleliu was the unforgettable "sickening stench of decaying bodies which added to the difficulties under which the troops fought."²⁵ Not enough men could be spared during the first few days to collect and bury the dead whose bodies lay where they fell, exposed to the elements and insects. To prevent the spreading of disease by flies, three 15-men sanitary squads, equipped with knapsack sprayers, came ashore on D-Day and followed the combat teams, carefully spraying the newly-developed insecticide, DDT, on opened enemy supply dumps, bodies, uncovered human feces, and other fly-feeding and breeding places. Twelve days later when the tactical situation permitted, low-flying aircraft dusted all of Peleliu with DDT, while the malaria control unit operated a truck-mounted power sprayer in the swamps and other suspected areas.

Peleliu was the scene of the first large-scale combat testing of DDT as a sanitation control agent. All mosquito nets and jungle hammocks were treated with a combination of DDT and kerosene, as were tents and other personnel shelters that came into use later. Sanitation experts soon made the discovery, however, that while the new insecticide worked excellently against adult flies and mosquitoes, it proved ineffective in killing the larvae. As a result, flies continued to breed, despite the combined efforts of planes, trucks, and portable DDT sprayers. In fact, the swarms

²¹ Col Harold O. Deakin ltr to CMC, dtd 10Mar50, in *Peleliu Comment File*. Negro Marines from the 16th Field Depot "were most proficient in this type of activity. All Unit Commanders praised their efficiency, zeal and cheerfulness in performing their duties." *1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase II, Anx D, p. 3.

²² Robert Martin in *Time*, 16Oct44, p. 38.

²³ Col Richard P. Ross, Jr., memo to Maj Frank O. Hough, dtd 7Nov49, hereafter *Ross memo*.

²⁴ Most heat prostration cases were usually treated at the medical aid stations close to the front, where no records were kept.

²⁵ *Ross memo*.

of flies exceeded anything that American troops had seen to date. During the second week in October, a gradual decline in the fly population set in. Apparently, the exertions of the DDT sprayers had not been in vain. "Probably for the first time in the history of military operations," stated the corps after-action report, "there had been a negligible number of casualties that could be attributed to flies or mosquitoes."²⁶

SUPPORTING THE DRIVE INLAND²⁷

For the first few days on Peleliu, conditions for rendering effective logistic support to the assault units left much to be desired. The inadequate beach space for receiving the mountains of materiel required to keep the advance alive permitted little organization of the support area. Supply dumps, bivouac areas, artillery emplacements, and equipment were located helter-skelter on the first piece of unoccupied land. This random location of logistical activities made more difficult the tasks of coordinating and controlling resupply missions, undertakings which were fre-

quently delayed because motor vehicles had severed vital telephone lines. Marines under enemy fire soon discovered that it was much faster to lay a new line than to search for a broken one. Adding to the cluttered appearance of the beachhead were the countless foxholes and shell craters that pockmarked the entire area.

When Rear Admiral John W. Reeves, Jr., responsible for the future base development of the Western Carolines Area, visited Peleliu shortly after D-Day, he was appalled by what he saw. The admiral at once requested through higher channels that certain artillery batteries be displaced immediately to allow supply dumps to occupy their permanent locations in accordance with the base development plan. General Rupertus, however, countered with the argument that these batteries firing from their present positions were essential in order to support the infantry and that it would be folly to tamper with an already critical tactical situation just to simplify some future garrison function. Since the recommendations of the ground commander are usually accepted during the combat phase, nothing ever came of Admiral Reeves' complaint.

As the assault troops pushed inland, regimental dumps displaced forward to support the attack. The Marines were fortunate in that the island's roads were capable, at least temporarily, of handling the division's transportation needs. For hauling supplies up to the front, each regiment had four LVTs, augmented by six 2½-ton cargo trucks once they became available.

²⁶ IIIAC Palaus Rpt, Encl J, "Medical Report of Palaus Operation," p. 5. One chaplain, however, clearly remembered "the havoc dysentery worked with the troops—almost equal to the heat and shells—and how everyone from the top down blamed it on the flies." LCdr Byron E. Allender ltr to CMC, dtd 8Feb50, in *Peleliu Comment File*.

²⁷ Additional sources used for this section are: *5th Mar Sup-EvacRpt*; Blackford, "Giants at Peleliu;" BuDocks, *Building the Navy's Bases in World War II: History of the Bureau of Yards and Docks and the Civil Engineer Corps 1940-1946*, 2 vols. (Washington: GPO, 1947), hereafter BuDocks, *World War II Hist*.

To facilitate unloading at the beach, a detachment of the 1054th Naval Construction Battalion (Seabees) began installing a pontoon causeway from Orange Beach 3 to the outer reef on 18 September, and the first LST unloaded over it on the following day. When additional pontoon causeways were added at the reef, the simultaneous unloading of three LSTs became possible. By 21 September, when the need for more unloading points became pressing, elements of the 1st Engineer Battalion and the 73d Seabees began work on access roads leading to the eastern and southern beaches. Two days later, both these beach areas were receiving LSTs for unloading.

On 19 September, the 33d Seabees started clearing the Peleliu airfield of all land mines, duds, debris, and shell fragments. Once the heavy engineering equipment began coming ashore, work on the repair of the existing fighter strip was immediately begun. Within 72 hours after having received the construction equipment on 20 September, the Seabees had cleared and leveled an operative strip, 260 feet by 3,875 feet, complete with runway lights.

The 1st Pioneer Battalion continued its shore party function, often unloading around the clock, until 28 September, when stevedores of the Island Command took over the beaches and supply dumps. While engaged in performing their assigned mission, the pioneers operated bulldozers on two different occasions to knock out enemy-held pillboxes; they supplied frontline troops directly from the shore dumps, often going to great lengths to locate vitally needed items; and once they even re-

linquished their own machine guns to fill an urgent infantry request.

Although during the initial phases of the landing no infantryman or artilleryman suffered from lack of ammunition—thanks to the acuity of the logistic planners and their innovations such as the waterborne supply beach—Marines found it difficult to build up desirable levels of 105mm and 81mm ammunition, as well as 60mm illuminating shells. Selective discharge of these needed items took place the day after the first ammunition resupply ship dropped anchor at Kossol Roads on 21 September. The high rate of ammunition expenditure continued, however, because of the strength of the enemy's defenses. The heavy fighting also resulted in many weapons being either damaged in combat or lost through carelessness. The 5th Marines, for example, had lost or damaged over 70 percent of its flamethrowers and bazookas by 17 September. In spite of the heavy fighting, which demanded large amounts of ammunition, weapons, and supplies, and the unforeseen beach congestion, which seriously hindered resupply operations, no real shortages of shells, weapons, or supplies developed during the first couple of weeks.

*TACTICAL SUPPORT*²⁸

Until Marine artillery was emplaced ashore on Peleliu and could assume responsibility for providing direct fire support to the infantry battalions, carrier-based aircraft had to fill part of the gap. As early as 17 September, how-

²⁸ An additional source used for this section was *11th MarOpRpt*.

ever, the reduction of all targets, except those in defilade or on reverse slopes, became the exclusive province of the artillery, and, by the 21st, almost all air missions were of the deep support type. On the whole, Marines were satisfied with the kind of air support given them by the naval pilots, but felt that their attempts to strafe were "of little value, due to the fact that the strafing runs were begun and completed at too high an altitude; pullouts from such never were made under 1,800 feet."²⁹

One other vexation was that some naval officers, prior to the landing, had led the Marines to expect too much from the use of napalm, considered at that time somewhat of a miracle weapon following its limited employment during the Marianas campaign. One briefing officer ever assured 1/7 that its assault to the south on Peleliu would encounter the infantryman's dream, "an objective stripped of concealing vegetation and devoid of live enemy soldiers."³⁰ The disappointment experienced by these Marines when they ran into some 1,500 elite Japanese troops who tenaciously resisted the southward advance can be imagined. Later, after the results of the first extensive use of napalm had been analyzed, the division recommended that the new weapon "should be used either on pinpoint targets or in such quantities that complete saturation of an area can be achieved. It is wasted when used in small quantities in area bombing."³¹

Carrier-based planes also provided aerial observation until Marine Observation Squadron-3 (VMO-3), whose first planes touched down on the partially repaired airstrip on 18 September, began operating ashore. The 11th Marines' battalions, in addition, had forward observers up with the advance infantry units. Since the officers coordinating the missions of air, naval gunfire, and artillery were all located at the division CP, each prospective target was assigned to the supporting arm best suited to reduce it.

For the first two weeks ashore, Marine artillery performed according to the operation plan, delivering preparatory, harassing, and interdicting fires as requested. When corps artillery came ashore on the second day, it was placed under control of the 11th Marines and tied in with the regimental fire direction center. Most artillery units massed their fires northward to support the assault on the ridges, but the 3d Battalion and a battery of the 3d 155mm Howitzer Battalion faced south to assist the 7th Marines' drive to the promontories. On 18 September, these units also shifted their fires northward against the entrenched Japanese amidst the central ridges. One battery of the 8th 155mm Gun Battalion, meanwhile, had taken up firing positions in anticipation of providing supporting fires for the 81st Infantry Division's landing on 17 September, but the expected call never came and this unit also faced about on the following day.

As a close support weapon on Peleliu, armor ranked just behind artillery, and far ahead of air or naval gunfire. "Tanks were so invaluable during the

²⁹ *1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase I, Anx L, pp. 4-5.

³⁰ *Worden ltr.*

³¹ *1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase II, Anx L, p. 6.

first few days that tank units enroute to support designated units were repeatedly intercepted by other units in dire straits which would beg for tank assistance."³² Whenever possible, this aid was given by the tankers before continuing on to their assigned destinations. Until the 155mm guns came ashore, the Shermans provided the only flat-trajectory, high-powered weapon that proved effective in sealing caves, blasting pillboxes, and reducing other fortifications. In fact, the tanks served as mobile artillery.

Because of the elaborate enemy underground defenses and the high value that Marines placed upon tank support, the Peleliu operation resulted in the longest continuous commitment in action experienced by any Marine tank battalion up to that time. The Shermans were seldom in reserve, even in the later stages, and often had to rearm several times daily. Their ammunition expenditure on D-Day, for example, was so high that an advance on the following day was possible only after shells were salvaged from damaged vehicles.

Throughout the campaign, supporting armor fought together with the assault troops as a team; only on three minor occasions did tanks ever advance without accompanying infantry. Because of the Shermans' better communication system and their constant presence near rifle units, division frequently made use of the tank radios to locate infantry elements or to pass on instructions to them.

Owing to mutual respect and admiration, the teamwork between the rifle-

men and the tankers was superb, and each went to heroic lengths to support the other. On one occasion, a rifle squad protecting the advance of a tank platoon melted away under enemy mortar fire until only two survivors remained, but these infantrymen doggedly kept on with their task of shepherding the Shermans. As if in an attempt to match the undaunted courage of their supporting infantrymen, the tankers reciprocated by risking both their bodies and their vehicles to aid hard-pressed Marines. Whenever the job could not be done any other way, the Shermans maneuvered into the most vulnerable positions, and crew members fought with part of their bodies protruding from the tanks' interiors to gain better observation. Indicative of the danger inherent in this practice was the high casualty rate among the tank battalion's officers. Eight out of the total 31 were killed, and only eight emerged from the long harrowing campaign unscathed. No Sherman was ever lost to close-in enemy assaults, however, for not even suicidal-minded Japanese, lugging Bangalore torpedoes or demolition charges, ever succeeded in breaking through the protective screen of Marine riflemen.

The Marines especially valued the tanks for their ability to quickly and safely reduce enemy fortifications that proved impervious to either infantry weapons or assaults. With their heavy armored plates warding off the hail of deadly automatic fire from Japanese fortifications, the Shermans could move up to pointblank range. After firing three or four rounds of high explosives, the gunner would shift to white phosphorus shells, a few of which usually

³² *Stuart ltr.*

silenced all enemy resistance. One tank crew actually destroyed 30 pillboxes and fortified positions within a single day's action.

Often, two Shermans would work in coordination with the thin-skinned LVT flamethrower to remove a particularly difficult position. After moving up and blasting the enemy fortification, the tanks would lay down covering fire while the flamethrower placed itself in between the protective hulls of the Shermans and burned out the target.

As an experiment, a small capacity flamethrower was installed in a Sherman, but the short range of the burst necessitated the tank's moving in at such close range that it became vulnerable to close-in enemy assaults, against which it was helpless since its bow machine gun had been removed to permit installation of the flamethrower. Primarily because of its lack of success in combat, this specially-equipped tank destroyed only a few enemy fortifications, and its assigned missions were more like battlefield experiments than anything else.

Another innovation tried by the 1st Tank Battalion on Peleliu was spaced armor. While still in the staging area, the tankers welded spare track over the turret and front slope plate of each Sherman, since earlier tests had demonstrated that this technique would increase the vehicle's resistance to both armor-piercing and large high-explosive projectiles. This unique use of spare track proved extremely effective and was officially credited with preventing the destruction of three tanks from direct hits by 75mm armor-piercing projectiles.

Without question, however, the most significant armored innovation on Peleliu was the flexible basis of tank employment. Previously, a tank company was attached to a rifle regiment and remained with it throughout the campaign regardless of whether the unit was in reserve or fighting over terrain unsuitable for tank employment. For the initial assault, Company A of the 1st Tank Battalion was attached to the 1st Marines, Company B to the 5th, and Company C to the 7th, but even after control reverted to the battalion commander on 16 September, the tank units still remained in direct support of the regiments. The radical departure from previous tank employment doctrine came when the insufficient number of Shermans within the division resulted in a widespread shifting of tanks and crews. Although the tank company commanders and liaison personnel remained permanently attached to the various regiments to insure continuity of liaison, the tank platoons were freely shifted from one rifle unit to another to replace battle losses, support a major effort, or take advantage of terrain suitable for tracked vehicle operations. The new policy proved its worth, since the maximum utilization of the limited number of tanks was realized.

The 1st Tank Battalion also experienced certain difficulties on Peleliu, for an "overoptimistic logistic concept of the Palau Operation resulted in an entirely inadequate amount of spare parts and maintenance equipment being taken forward."³³ Only by the salvaging of parts from damaged vehicles was the

³³ 1st MarDiv SAR, Phase II, Anx J, p. 9.

average of 20 operative tanks maintained throughout the campaign. Moreover, the repair crews suffered considerable casualties while stripping the immobile tanks under the identical enemy fire that had knocked them out. "Additional spare parts," the tank battalion reported, "would have saved both men and time."³⁴ Just three tanks equipped with bulldozer blades and one tank retriever were landed, but they quickly proved invaluable. Besides serving to clear away debris and to fill anti-tank ditches, the tank-dozers were found to be quite useful in sealing up apertures of Japanese bunkers while the occupants were still active and firing.

Like the tankers, the combat engineers, including Headquarters and Service Company of the 1st Engineer Battalion, landed with the infantry regiments to which they were attached. Even after reverting to battalion control on 26 September, the engineers still worked closely with the assault troops. Often, details of combat engineers went forward of front lines to hack out trails, clear away mines and boobytraps, or blast enemy-held caves and fortifications. As the official report stated, demolitions proved to be "the greatest engineer problem."³⁵ One demolition team attached to 3/1 was credited with killing over 200 Japanese during a five-day period of neutralization of enemy pillboxes and caves. These demolition experts also cleared away coral heads that impeded the landing of amphibian vehicles, blasted water wells in the coral

subsurface, deactivated duds and boobytraps, and cleared the beaches and access roads of all mines.

*DEADLOCK AMIDST THE RIDGES*³⁶

By the fifth day of the assault, practically all those Japanese who were able to withdraw before the swift onslaught of the Marines had rejoined Colonel Nakagawa's main forces in the Umurbrogols. Here, according to General Inoue's master plan, the decisive struggle for Peleliu would be waged. In contrast to earlier Pacific campaigns, no large-scale *banzai* charge was contemplated. General Inoue had specifically warned the Peleliu Island Commander against wasting his battle strength in futile attacks; instead, Colonel Nakagawa was instructed to defend his hold on the high ground to the last man in an attempt to deny, or at least delay, the use of the airfield to the invading Americans. As long as some of the Japanese remained in their fortified positions, hidden high-velocity guns could bombard the airstrip, or suicide squads armed with high explosives could sally forth to wreak havoc on the runways. As a result, the advancing Marines were forced to assault each enemy emplacement individually, while Japanese artillery and mortar fire continued its rain of death and destruction along the front and to the rear.

At 0700 on 19 September, the attack was resumed along the entire 1st Ma-

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase II, Anx I, p. 3.

³⁶ Additional sources used for this section are: *1st Mar Hist*; *1/1 UHist*; *3/1 Rec of Events*, 19-23Sep44; *7th Mar R-2 Jnl*, 19-22Sep44; *1/7 HistRpt*, 19-22Sep44; *2/7 WarD*, 19-22Sep44; *3/7 WarD*, 19-22Sep44.

rines' front. Colonel Puller had received no new directives; his regiment still had the assigned mission of seizing the high terrain up to phase line 0-2. The 3d Battalion, unmolested except by snipers, moved up the western coastal flats for some 400 yards before halting in order to retain contact with neighboring units advancing more slowly over the ridges. Here, 2/7, still under operational control of the 1st Marines, overcame stiff resistance to seize the forward slopes of Hills 200 and 260, for a day's gain of 300 yards. Company A of 1/1 passed through to press the attack, but it ran headlong into a sheer 150-foot cliff which, coupled with heavy enemy fire, stopped the assault cold. Only six men out of the entire rifle company managed to regain 2/7's lines without either being killed or wounded.

It was the 2d Battalion, however, that first tested the strength of Colonel Nakagawa's final bastion. After a 500-yard advance in the face of increasing enemy resistance, the foremost assault units encountered the same foreboding hill mass that had blunted the attack of Company B the previous day. This dominating piece of terrain became known as the Five Sisters, because it contained five peaks; they averaged 250 feet in height and were separated from each other by steep cliffs. The southern face was at first dubbed "Bloody Nose Ridge" by the Marines. No sooner had the battalion consolidated its forward positions than it launched a full-scale assault directly at the forbidding height.

Preparatory air and artillery strikes thoroughly plastered both the forward and reverse slopes of the hill mass, while

all tanks and mortars attached to 2/7 were brought over to support the all-out effort of Honsowetz' battalion. Rushing forward in small groups to minimize casualties from the terrific enemy fire, the Marines grimly fought their way ahead, and their Shermans, mortars, and LVT flamethrowers ventured as far forward as possible to provide direct fire support. Despite the vigor and determination with which the riflemen pressed the assault, it collapsed completely by noon. Even the most pessimistic Marine present there that day did not dream that the defenders of the Five Sisters would frustrate all attempts to storm them for over two months.

Later in the afternoon, the attack was resumed. This time, the battalion commander committed all three of his rifle companies in a frontal assault, meanwhile attempting an enveloping movement from the east with Company C of 1/1, fresh from regimental reserve. If this force could seize Hill 100 (later to be christened Walt Ridge) whose summit dominated the East Road and adjoining swampy terrain, a springboard would be gained for an attack on the hill mass from the rear.

Captain Everett P. Pope led the 90 men of Company C through a swamp on the right flank of 2/1 to emerge on the East Road. No sooner had the group begun assault operations against two large pillboxes discovered near the base of Walt Ridge, than a Japanese machine gun opened up from the right flank across a small pond some 50 yards away. Pinned down without any hopes of reaching the enemy gunner, whose accuracy inflicted numerous casualties,

Captain Pope finally withdrew his men for another try along a different approach.

The concentrated Japanese fire, meanwhile, was exacting a stiff toll among the exposed men of the 2d Battalion as they struggled toward the towering Five Sisters. The losses within two of the rifle companies that afternoon became so great that they were combined in the field into a still-under-strength company, even though a squad of men from the 4th War Dog Platoon had been thrown in as a reinforcement.

It was late afternoon before Company C, now supported by the division reconnaissance company, was in position to renew its assault on Walt Ridge. This time, Captain Pope planned to approach by way of a causeway over a large sinkhole and to continue up the East Road to the base of the objective. Armor was scheduled to spearhead the advance, but the first Sherman to venture onto the narrow causeway slipped off to one side, while a following tank also lost its traction and slid off the other side.

Since the partially-blocked route barred the approach of additional tanks, Captain Pope's men did the only thing left to them. Crossing the exposed causeway in squad rushes, the riflemen raced on to the base of the ridge, paused briefly to catch their breaths, and then assaulted directly up the slopes. With only machine gun and mortar fire supporting them, the climbers clawed and pulled their way up the rugged slides, and the swiftness of their attack took the enemy by surprise. The Marines carried the crest, but, to their disap-

pointment, they immediately received extremely heavy fire from positions about 50 yards up the ridgeline, where the Japanese held a knoll that completely dominated the newly-won terrain.

Reluctant to abandon the summit that had cost them so many dead and wounded, the men of Company C held out in their isolated and exposed positions throughout the night, while the enraged foe hurled everything he had into the struggle in a desperate bid to oust the Marines from the vital crest. Machine gun bullets crisscrossed the entire ridgetop, and large-caliber shells and mortar rounds plummeted down from above with devastating effect. Using the darkness as a shield, Japanese infantry moved forward to launch one savage counterattack after another. Before dawn arrived to bring surcease to the besieged Marines, they had expended all of their ammunition and were forced to use their fists, broken ammunition boxes, and chunks of coral to hurl their assailants back down the slopes. Only Captain Pope and 15 men remained when the first light of morning revealed to the weary survivors that the enemy had moved up machine guns, which now opened with deadly effect. Since the Marines' positions were clearly untenable in the face of this new threat, permission was granted to withdraw.

That morning, 20 September, the 1st and 2d Battalions of Puller's regiment combined in a final all-out effort to retake Walt Ridge. Every available supporting arm, from LVT(A)s to 37mm guns, was brought up as far as possible,

while regimental headquarters was stripped of personnel to bolster the depleted ranks of the assault units. Even a provisional company was formed of cooks, wiremen, and supply handlers, who manned 12 machine guns in support of the attack.

Somehow the weary Marines, already exhausted physically and mentally by five days of constant assault over rugged terrain and against fanatical resistance, summoned up enough reserve energy and courage to make another valiant attempt. One private remembered the ensuing assault that sixth day, when he and his comrades were waved forward toward the towering ridges by their sergeant:

'Let's get killed up on that high ground there,' he said. 'It ain't no good to get it down here.' As the men stumbled out for him, he said, 'That's the good lads.'

The whole motley lot—a fighting outfit only in the minds of a few officers in the First Regiment and in the First Division—started up the hill. I have never understood why. Not one of them refused. They were the hard core—the men who couldn't or wouldn't quit. They would go up a thousand blazing hills and through a hundred blasted valleys, as long as their legs would carry them. They were Marine riflemen.³⁷

Their bold rushes that day carried some of them to positions so advanced that the Marines killed in the fighting could not be removed for many more days. Their heroic sacrifice was in vain, however, for the seized ground proved untenable in the face of the concen-

trated and sustained enemy fire, which had already knocked out so many tanks and other supporting arms. "Despite the intense barrage, weapons which were not hit continued firing. The mortars glowed red, and machine guns blew up, but those that could, continued to fire."³⁸

An accurate, if terse, account of the day's furious struggle was contained in Colonel Nakawaga's report to General Inoue that night:

Since dawn, the enemy has been concentrating their forces . . . vainly trying to approach *Higashiyama* [Walt Ridge] and *Kansokuyama* [Hill 300] with 14 tanks and one infantry battalion under the powerful aid of air and artillery fire. However, they were again put to rout receiving heavy losses.³⁹

That afternoon, the battered Marines of the 1st and 2d Battalions were relieved in their frontline positions by 1/7, while 3/7 replaced 2/7. The 3d Battalion, 1st Marines, still remained in its zone along the western coast for two more days, but the rest of the regiment had sustained too many losses and been strained too often to the breaking point during the battle of the ridges to be effective in any further assault effort.

On 21 September, two companies of the relatively fresh 1/7 moved up the East Road in column to attempt recapture of Walt Ridge. The lead unit, Company C, which was scheduled to make the assault, passed over the causeway, still partially blocked by the immobilized Shermans, and continued up the road

³⁷ Russell Davis, *Marine at War* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1961), pp. 113, 114, used with permission.

³⁸ *1st Mar Hist*, p. 15.

³⁹ *Japanese CenPacOps*, p. 88.

to the point where it skirted the base of the objective. Here, supporting tanks, which had to bypass the causeway sink-hole, joined the advance.

As the leading elements of Company C came abreast of the ridge, enemy fire increased, and when the assault up the eastern slope began, the Japanese greeted the Marines with a mortar barrage that completely blanketed them. Soldiers in the caves above sprayed the scrambling Marines with automatic fire and lobbed grenades down on them, while artillery pieces, cunningly concealed on nearby high ground and impossible to spot, blasted the attackers. Weakened by excessive losses and unable even to hold the ground gained, the Marines evacuated the hillside and returned with their support unit, Company A, to the battalion lines, where Company B had remained poised all day.

On the same day, 3/7 assaulted over the ridges in the center. After a fast start, the progress, "for the rest of the day was slow and tedious and measured in yards."⁴⁰ Since it was evident that the only real gains would be made over the level ground, the battalions' zones were shifted, which narrowed 3/1's front and permitted this left flank unit to exploit the enemy's weakness in the area without breaking contact. Before 3/1 was relieved two days later, it succeeded in pushing a tank-infantry patrol forward 1,000 yards to reach the village of Garekoru without encountering serious opposition.

The next day, 22 September, the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines, attacked across the left portion of the ridges over ter-

rain that steadily grew more difficult. The day's gain was a mere 80 yards, for skillfully concealed Japanese machine guns pinned the lead units down time and time again. In the center of the ridges, the 2d Battalion, whose exhausted troops had been brought out of reserve, remained on the defensive and did not attempt any offensive action. On the right, however, the 1st Battalion spent most of the day making careful preparation to seize the Five Sisters.

At 1445, after Marine artillery blasted the enemy front with heavy concentrations, Company B of 1/7 moved out in attack, followed by Company A in close support. Riflemen and supporting tanks made their approach to the objective under a screen of smoke laid down by Marine mortars, while Weapons Company blazed away at Walt Ridge in an attempt to confuse the enemy as to the direction of the attack. For the first 250 yards, the riflemen received only sniper fire; then hidden machine guns on the nearby ridges opened up with a murderous stream of fire.

By this time, the foremost Marines had begun venturing into the mouth of a draw, soon to be known as "Death Valley." Its steep walls on both sides were dotted with mutually-supporting enemy gun emplacements and rifle pits. The accompanying Shermans were barred from entering, for the floor of the declivity proved to be mined, but they fired white phosphorus and high-explosive shells into the caves lining the canyon's cliffs as the Marine riflemen pushed on. The Japanese gunners, however, with their clear fields of fire, exacted such a heavy toll that a platoon

⁴⁰ 3/7 WarD, 21Sep44.

from Company A was rushed up to bolster the depleted ranks of the assault unit.

The Marines did not venture much farther into the funnel-like canyon before running into a sheer cliff that barred the way. At this point, the lead riflemen were actually within 100 yards of Colonel Nakagawa's CP and the last enemy stronghold to be reduced during the long campaign. Since the precipitous walls on all three sides made any infantry assault of the Japanese cave positions impossible, a withdrawal was ordered to prevent any additional losses from the deadly rain of fire that raked the Marines. The supporting company and its Shermans moved up under a cover of smoke to support the evacuation, and, by 1830, the entire force had withdrawn.

When darkness settled over the battlefield on 22 September, one phase of the Peleliu campaign had ended and another had begun. No longer would Marines, soon to be reinforced by Army troops from Angaur, suffer prohibitive casualties in fruitless frontal assaults on the ridges from the south. Instead, an end run around Colonel Nakagawa's devilishly-designed last-ditch positions would be made up the western coast in

search of a better attack route to the final pocket of Japanese resistance.

Although the campaign was to drag on for another two months of bitter fighting, the 1st Marine Division in a week of constant assault had seized the vital airfield, the commanding terrain behind it, and all of the island south of the Umurbrogols. Ample room for the proper deployment of both division and corps artillery had been gained, and all hindrances to unloading over the beaches had been removed, leaving only the weather as an unknown factor.

All of Peleliu containing strategic value had been captured by the Marines, but the cost had been high. Casualties totaled 3,946. These heavy losses eliminated one regiment as an effective assault unit and severely depleted the strength of the other two. The 1st Marines, for instance, suffered 56 percent casualties and, among the nine rifle platoons of its 1st Battalion, not one of the original platoon leaders, and only 74 of the riflemen, remained. As a sergeant remarked upon relief, "This ain't a regiment. We're just survivors."⁴¹

⁴¹ George McMillan *et al*, *Uncommon Valor: Marine Divisions in Action* (Washington: Infantry Journal Press, 1946), p. 58.

Angaur and Ulithi¹

ANGAUR: THE MEN AND THE PLAN

On D-Day, while the Marines fought tenaciously to secure a beachhead on Peleliu, the IIIAC landing force scheduled to seize Angaur participated in a feinting movement northward against Babelthuap. The convoy of transports and LSTs carrying the 81st Infantry Division, accompanied by a protective screen of destroyers, hove to off the coast of the huge enemy-held island about noon and began to engage in pre-landing activities. Besides serving to confuse the Japanese as to the real target of the American attack, the force afloat provided a handy source of combat-ready troops in the eventuality that the Peleliu landing ran into trouble.

Though still untested in combat, the Army division had been training and preparing for this role for over two years. The insignia of the 81st was an angry wildcat, its nickname was the Wildcat Division, and the men referred to themselves as Wildcats.

Slated for the Pacific Theater and participation in Operation STALE-

MATE, the Army division debarked in July 1944 at the Hawaiian Islands, its staging area. While the men topped off their stateside training with amphibious exercises, the staff planners busied themselves with the essential tactical and logistical preparations, coordinating them whenever necessary. The assigned target was Angaur Island, situated just south of Peleliu and possessing extensive low level areas which were considered ideal for the construction of a heavy bomber field.

Like the 1st Marine Division, the 81st found its planning complicated by the changing concept of Operation STALEMATE. The Navy plan for the invasion of the Palaus had called for seizure of Angaur first, to be followed almost immediately by the capture of Peleliu. General Julian Smith, in his dual capacity as Commanding General, Administrative Command, V Amphibious Corps, and Commanding General, Expeditionary Troops, took issue with this concept. He maintained that while Angaur was being attacked, the Japanese would have ample opportunity to reinforce Peleliu from Babelthuap, which was garrisoned by a force estimated at upwards of 25,000 troops. Initial seizure of Peleliu, on the other hand, would cut off Angaur from that source of reinforcement. The Navy accepted this revision of concept, but desiring Angaur for construction of a second airfield, continued throughout to

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: 81st InfDiv Op Rpt, The Capture of Angaur Island, 17Sep-22Oct44, dtd 26Dec44, hereafter *81st InfDiv OpRpt—Angaur*; Historical Committee, *81st Infantry Division*; Smith, *Approach to the Philippines*; Morison, *Leyte*; Hough, *Assault on Peleliu*.

press for the earliest possible landing on that island.²

The plan continued to be revised through 16 September, at which time the last change became effective. On that date, RCT 323, then serving as IIIAC floating reserve, was designated the Ulithi assault force with orders to proceed immediately on its new mission. The Army officers responsible for planning the Angaur operation were at first handicapped by the lack of intelligence about the terrain and the enemy garrison. Fortunately, recently taken aerial photographs, as well as enemy documents captured on Saipan, reached the staff officers in time to help clarify the situation.

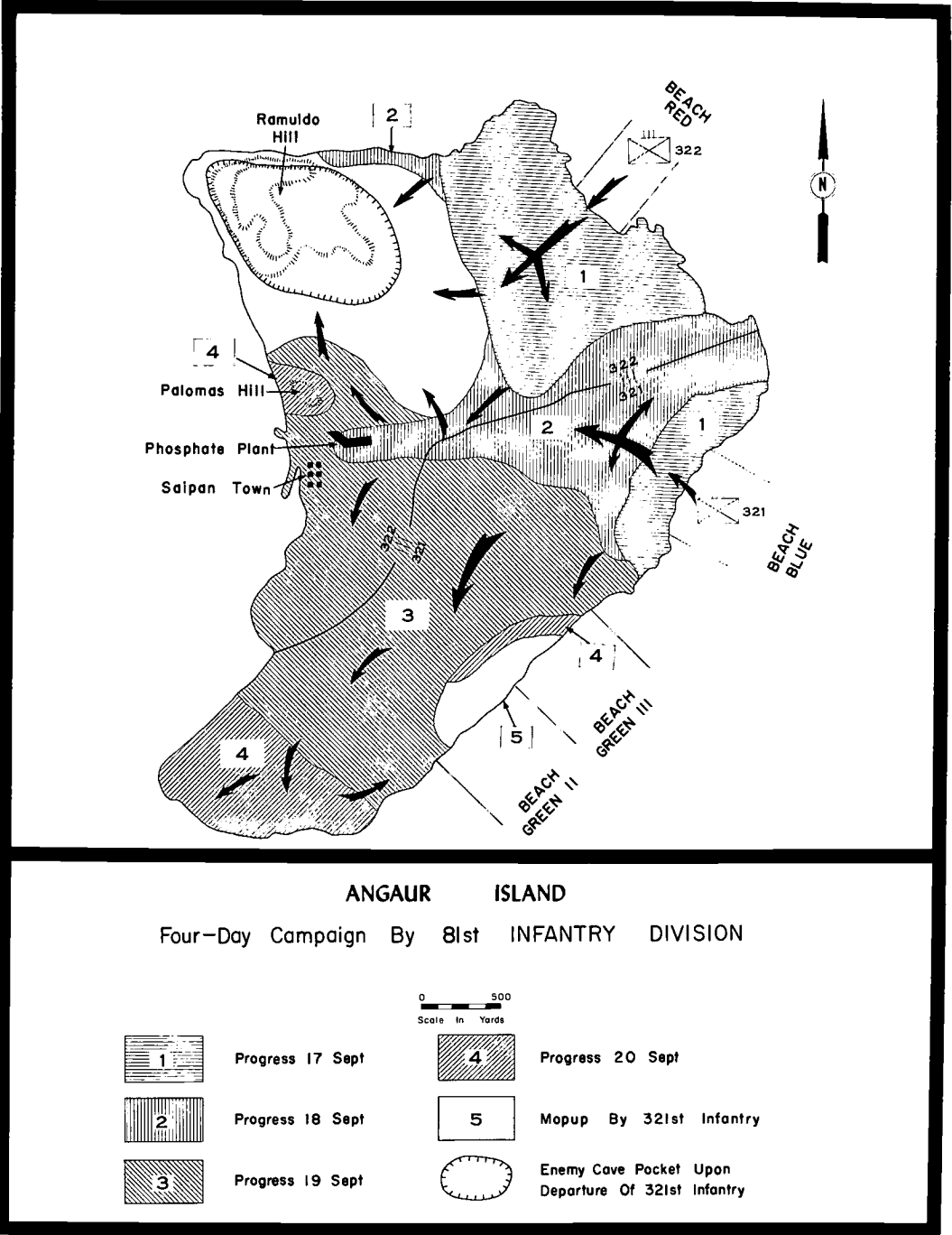
As finally evolved, the Angaur landing became a two-pronged assault utilizing two RCTs attacking over separate beaches. Red Beach was located on the northeastern coast of the island; Blue Beach was situated near the center of the east coast (See Map 6). Two thousand yards of rocky shoreline separated the two landing points. Single lines of advance from both beaches to the interior of the island led straight into the thick, tangled undergrowth of the rain forest. Even though these beaches were the least desirable of any on Angaur the decision of Army planners to land at the two widely separated points was based on sound tactical reasons. These were the absence of a fringing reef at the proposed landing sites and the presence of weaker enemy defenses than existed elsewhere on the island.

Major Ushio Goto, the Japanese commander on Angaur, did not have suffi-

cient troops to defend all possible landing points. Even by concentrating his forces to cover only those beaches offering most advantages to an invader, he still had to spread his troops dangerously thin. To thwart the American assault, the major had only his *1st Battalion, 59th Infantry*, for General Inoue had withdrawn the remainder of the Angaur garrison to Babelthuap during the latter part of July in the belief that the larger island was the most likely objective of any Allied attack. Subsequent reinforcements from Babelthuap had brought the total Japanese strength on Angaur to 1,400 men. American intelligence overestimated enemy strength, and planners of the 81st Infantry Division expected to encounter no less than two Japanese battalions totalling 2,500 men. The decision to land two regiments in the initial assault was the direct result of this faulty intelligence.

The Japanese commander decided to rely upon the natural barrier provided by the rain forest and the distance between vital areas of the island to deter any Allied landing over Red and Blue Beaches. If the Americans chose to strike there, Major Goto expected to have ample time to concentrate and deploy his forces for a successful counterattack. The landing beaches selected for the assault were lightly fortified; the more favorable landing sites on Angaur featured elaborate defenses. These consisted of reinforced concrete pillboxes, supporting arms designed to provide clear fields of fire across the beaches, as well as mines, tetrahedrons, and barbed wire barricades. Major Goto had positioned the bulk of the island

² *Smith interview.*



Map 6

E. L. Wilson

garrison within close supporting distance of the southern, western, and eastern beaches.

Upon completion of last-minute training, the 81st Division sailed from Hawaii on 12 August for Guadalcanal, where it arrived 12 days later. At Cape Esperance the infantrymen made two practice landings, attempting to simulate battlefield conditions on Angaur. In early September the Western Attack Force departed from Guadalcanal for the Palaus. Confidence prevailed among the infantrymen as they neared their first action. "The troops," commented the Army division history, "were as physically fit as any that ever set forth to war."³ On the coral beaches of Angaur, in the crucible of combat, the truth of this statement was soon to be tested.

On the morning of 12 September, the Western Attack Force moved into position off the Palaus. While other ships proceeded with the task of softening Peleliu's defenses, the two battleships, four light cruisers, and five destroyers of the Angaur Attack Group, commanded by Rear Admiral William H. P. Blandy, began a deliberate and systematic bombardment of their objective. Every known or suspected enemy fortification on the small island was thoroughly blasted by the heavy naval guns, or bombed and strafed by carrier planes flying numerous strikes. Minesweepers and UDT teams, meanwhile, executed their prelanding missions off Red, Blue, and Green Beaches, the latter an alternate landing site.

Early on 15 September, the 1st Marine Division landed on Peleliu and embarked upon its task of wresting a secure beachhead from the defending force. Throughout the day, General Mueller and his men anxiously followed the progress of the assault, for its outcome would determine when the Wildcats would be released from their reserve mission for the Angaur landing. So confident was the Navy that Fox Day, the invasion of Angaur, would be on 16 September that, on the previous evening, in accordance with Navy custom, they fed the soldiers the best evening meal possible, including steak, chicken, frozen strawberries, and other delicacies.⁴ The 15th passed, however, without the arrival of the expected order.

The next morning, 16 September, Marines advanced across the runways of the Peleliu airfield, prime objective of the assault. When General Rupertus failed to request reinforcements for his division by noon, higher commanders concluded that the need for the large Army reserve had passed. Moreover, Admiral Blandy had reported that the preliminary bombardments, hydrographic conditions, and UDT preparations all favored a successful landing on Angaur. During the afternoon of 16 September, the commanders of the Western Attack Force (Admiral Fort) and IIIAC (General Geiger) conferred and decided to release the 81st Infantry Division for a landing the following day. This order was issued at 1432, and the division command on board the APA *Fremont* immediately made last

³ Historical Committee, *81st Infantry Division*, p. 65.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

minute preparations for the Angaur assault, then only 18 hours away.

THE WILDCATS SEIZE THEIR OBJECTIVE⁶

Before dawn on Fox Day, 17 September, the warships of the task group under Rear Admiral Blandy sent shells screaming towards Angaur. The fire support plan employed by the Navy provided for fire from 2 battleships, 4 cruisers, 5 destroyers, 9 LCI(G)s, and 4 LCI(M)s, the latter firing 20mm and 40mm guns, rockets, and mortars.⁶ Heavy explosions soon rocked the island. Shortly after 0740, 40 fighter-bombers swept down out of the skies to bomb and strafe enemy positions behind the beaches. At 0810, precisely on schedule, the approach to the shore began. LCIs led the way, blazing away with guns, mortars, and rocket concentrations. The initial assault waves made the journey in LVTs, but following waves were boated in LCVPs and LCMs, for even LSTs could beach with dry ramps on the reef-free shores.

RCT 321 landed with two battalions abreast in columns of companies over Blue Beach at 0830, while RCT 322 did

likewise over Red Beach six minutes later. No entrenched Japanese infantry opposed the landing; the only enemy resistance consisted of sporadic mortar, machine gun, and rifle fire, which caused neither casualties nor damage.

As viewed through the eyes of the Japanese Army commander on Babelthuap, the American invasion of Angaur appeared to be fraught with disaster for the invasion force, and the situation at that island on 17 September was described as follows:

Under the protection of bombing, strafing, and naval gunfire enemy craft, including battleships, approached as close as 100 meters off the coast and commenced firing. This has been going on since dawn. The enemy launched a landing party of 30 barges at 0800 along our northeastern coast line. However, the Angaur Unit was able to put the enemy to rout and start a state of confusion with the aid of the guns which had been planted there.⁷

Shortly thereafter the Japanese conceded that a second landing attempt was more successful and that by 0900 American forces in a strength of about 2,000 men had taken up positions on land, accompanied by a large group of tanks. The American losses for the first day of operations on Angaur were listed as 30 barges blown up and sunk, 20 barges destroyed, and 15 tanks destroyed, a somewhat unreasonable figure in view of the lack of initial Japanese opposition at the beaches.

The men of the invasion force remained blissfully unaware of the rout and disaster to which the Japanese headquarters staff at Koror had rele-

⁶ Unless otherwise noted the material in this section is derived from: *81st InfDiv OpRpt—Angaur*; RCT 321 *OpRpt*, The Capture of Angaur Island, 1Jul–30Sep44, dtd 26Nov44, hereafter *RCT 321 OpRept—Angaur*; RCT 322 *OpRpt*, Angaur Island—Palau Group, 1Jul–23Oct44, dtd 1Dec33, hereafter *RCT 322 OpRpt—Angaur*; *Japanese CenPac Ops*; *Peleliu Comment File*; Historical Committee, *81st Infantry Division*; Smith, *Approach to the Philippines*; Morison, *Leyte*; Hough, *Assault on Peleliu*.

⁶ Anx C, 81st InfDiv FO No. 7, dtd 5Aug44.

⁷ *Japanese CenPacOps*, p. 87.



U.S. ARMY 81st Infantry Division invades Angaur Island. (USA SC 196034)



"WILDCATS" closing in on enemy pocket, Angaur. (USA SC 196033)

gated them on paper. Rushing across some 20 yards of slightly inclined, rubble-strewn strips of sand to the crest of a low embankment at the edge of the jungle, the Army troops established a firing line. Then, with the beachheads secure, the men plunged headlong into the semi-dark, almost impenetrable undergrowth. Their immediate objective was Phase Line 0-1, some 300 yards inland. On the opposite side of Angaur, meanwhile, the transports carrying RCT 323, the IIIAC floating reserve, were feinting a landing off Saipan Town in hopes of confusing the enemy.

This ruse apparently succeeded. When Major Goto learned of the American landings, he dispatched a rifle company towards the eastern beaches to attack the Americans, but made no move to organize a large-scale counterattack. The Japanese commander's belief that the main assault would come over the southern beaches, where he had deployed the bulk of his troops, may have been further strengthened by the feint landing. At any rate, he did not attempt to shift any of his forces northward. To forestall any such move, American naval gunfire, as well as aerial bombing and strafing, repeatedly hit every potential assembly area on the island throughout the day. These interdictory fires might well have made any regrouping of the forces of Major Goto a disaster and prevented any sizeable counterattack from materializing. While the Japanese defense units prepared for combat, scouts were dispatched to observe the movements of the invasion force. In case the defense was unsuc-

cessful in the daytime, a counterattack was planned for the coming night.⁸

The American assault regiments advanced slowly at first from Red and Blue Beaches. No roads penetrated the almost trackless jungle, whose floor was matted and choked with fallen trees, broken branches, and snarled vines. The sweat-drenched soldiers of the 322d, hacking and groping their way through the undergrowth, found the terrain a much more formidable obstacle than the intermittent mortar, machine gun, and sniper fire from an enemy hidden by the dense foliage. On the beaches, meanwhile, the buildup of men and materiel continued. Upon coming ashore, the medium tanks immediately headed for the frontlines over trails cleared for them by bulldozers. By noon it was apparent that despite the Wildcat's lack of familiarity with combat conditions, they had made a successful amphibious assault. They were now in a position to extend their grip on the island.

Although the advance of RCT 322 was progressing on schedule, the 321st had rough going from the very outset. The regiment encountered strongly held enemy fortifications on its southern flank near Rocky Point, on its northern flank near Cape Ngatpokul, and to its front as well. Expansion of the beachhead proved extremely difficult and time-consuming.

By late afternoon of Fox Day the accomplishments of his regiments failed to measure up to General Mueller's ex-

⁸ IIIAC C-2 Rpt No. 7, dtd 21Sep44.

pectations. Not all of Phase Line 0-1, which extended from the northern shore of Angaur about 500 yards southwest of Cape Gallatin to a point roughly 250 yards southwest of Rocky Point had been seized. Furthermore, a 700-yard gap still separated the two regiments. Orders issued for the attack that afternoon were intended to rectify this situation. Before nightfall, General Mueller hoped to occupy more favorable positions and ordered his regiments to probe for a possible weak spot in the enemy defenses, particularly in the area separating the two beachheads. The 322d Infantry Regiment was to push forward to Phase Line 0-2, extending generally southward from a point about 400 yards west of 0-1 on the north shore to Green Beach on the eastern shore, with emphasis on achieving a juncture with RCT 321 as soon as possible.

By 1430 the general attack had been resumed, and the soldiers of both regiments pushed forward all along the line. In the vicinity of Blue Beach a combination of naval gunfire and bombing and strafing by supporting aircraft failed to eliminate the Japanese pillboxes impeding the advance of the 321st Infantry Regiment. The task of reducing them fell to the foot soldier. Gingerly picking their way over the rubble-strewn sand, riflemen gained positions from which they furnished protective fire until a portable flamethrower could be brought into action. Once the flaming tongue of napalm started licking at the gunport of a pillbox, demolition teams rushed forward to place their charges. No sooner had the walls of the

fortification been breached than the riflemen began crawling towards the next pillbox. Though painfully slow, this method was effective. Dusk found some men of RCT 321 beyond Phase Line 0-1, but both flanks still lagged short of the first objective.

The advance of RCT 322 was progressing smoothly enough in the north, despite the failure of the two assault regiments to effect a juncture. Though RCT 322 managed to establish defensive perimeters along most of Phase Line 0-2 in its zone, it still had not been able to push patrols south far enough to join up with the adjacent unit. Out of necessity, both regiments bent their lines to form separate beachheads.

After a day of incessant pounding by American warships and planes, darkness came as a welcome relief to Major Goto and his men. This respite from the punishing interdiction fires gave the Japanese a chance to recuperate and to move to new defensive positions without fear of American interference. Like Colonel Nakagawa on Peleliu, the *Angaur Sector Unit* commander had received specific orders from General Inoue not to waste his men in any savage but short-lived *banzai* charges. Instead, Major Goto was to delay the capture of Angaur as long as possible. Once it had become clear beyond any doubt that the Americans were making their major drive over the northeastern beaches, Major Goto planned to withdraw his garrison forces from the southern part of the island and concentrate them in the hills that dotted the northwest portion of Angaur. Here, amidst the highest and most rugged coral ridges

on the island, the Japanese garrison commander would make his final stand.

The Wildcats, weary both physically and emotionally from their first taste of combat, found little relief during the hours of darkness. Not only did small enemy patrols probe and jab at the perimeters of both regiments, but Japanese infiltrators continually attempted to penetrate the frontlines. To add to the confusion of the first night, the soldiers of the 81st, like all untried troops, engaged in indiscriminate firing at imagined targets.⁹

The next morning, in a predawn attack, a reinforced Japanese company smashed into the extreme southern flank of 1/321, forcing the Wildcats back some 50 to 75 yards. Nevertheless, the faltering lines soon rallied, and by 0618 division received word that the Japanese counterattack had been stopped. Any premature hope that the attack could now be resumed was doomed when it became apparent that the Japanese had broken off their initial counter-attack only in order to regroup. Before long they struck again with renewed vigor and the men of the 1st Battalion were quickly initiated into the ferocity of close combat with a fanatical and determined opponent. The arrival of friendly aircraft and reinforcements after daybreak quickly turned the tide of battle for the beleaguered infantry and slowly the enemy attack subsided. This action marked the first time the 81st Infantry Division found itself in a defensive situation since going ashore.

⁹ "Stern measures were instituted to suppress the tendency toward trigger-happiness." Historical Committee, *81st Infantry Division*, p. 78.

While RCT 321 had been fully engaged in holding the ground it had taken the previous day, the 322d was not idle. At dawn a Japanese counterattack hit its lines, but on a somewhat smaller scale and with much less effect than the one that had hit the adjacent regiment. In launching these attacks Major Goto was complying without deviation with his orders from General Inoue "to carry out strong counterattacks, from previously planned and prepared positions in order to destroy the enemy that has landed, by dawn of the next day."¹⁰

Fortunately for the Wildcats, only one small group of enemy troops had moved into the gap separating the two regiments during the night, and they withdrew at daybreak without having fired a shot. This again represented a radical departure from previous Japanese tactics, which had required the Japanese to expend themselves as soon as possible after an American landing, often in a futile *banzai* charge. In fact, had the Japanese exploited their advantage and rushed men in force into this unprotected area, much damage might have been caused to the exposed beach-heads, which by this time were crowded with supporting troops, supplies, and materiel. Such an attack would have been in keeping with the theory of General Inoue "that if we repay the Americans (who rely solely upon material power) with material power it will shock them beyond imagination. . . ."¹¹

¹⁰ Palau Sector Group Headquarters; Palau Sector Group training order entitled "Training for Victory," dtd 11Jul44, Item No. 11,190 in CinCPac-CinCPOA Translations No. 3, dtd 7Nov44.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

Major Goto, however, had already taken steps to assure the success of his mission. According to his plans, the final and decisive battle for Angaur would be fought elsewhere on the island, in terrain of his choosing. Thus, for the moment, he had no intention of weakening his force unduly despite the confusion that could be created at the exposed beachheads by a well-timed and executed Japanese counterattack.

General Mueller's orders for the second day of operations on Angaur called for the attack to jump off at 0900. It so happened that neither regiment moved out on schedule. RCT 322 lagged behind mainly because of the confusion resulting from indiscriminate firing in the rear by nervous and inexperienced service troops that saw a Japanese lurking behind every bush and reacted accordingly. The 321st Infantry Regiment, on the other hand, was delayed by new counterattacks. At 0905 an attack hit the right flank of that regiment, but strafing and bombing runs called down by the air liaison officer quickly broke up the enemy effort. Half an hour later another counterattack struck the southern flank of the regiment. Well-timed and expertly delivered supporting fires from mortars, tanks, and an LCI lying off the beach permitted the Wildcats to hold their ground.

At 1045, RCT 321 finally jumped off with two battalions in assault. To the south, the 1st Battalion assaulted southwestward in the wake of the last abortive Japanese counterattack, only to be halted almost immediately by concentrated fire from enemy fortifications near Rocky Point. Here, to forestall any advance into the interior, the Japanese

had constructed a near-perfect defensive system. It consisted of pillboxes, dugouts, rifle pits, and interconnecting trenches, all mutually supporting and capable of delivering fires both to the front and to the flanks. A frontal assault from the beachhead would be prohibitive both in time and in casualties, and so a flanking maneuver was set into motion.

The battalion started inland over the Southern Railroad,¹² and followed the tracks for some distance before swerving through the jungle to approach the heavily fortified beach positions from the vulnerable rear. Dense jungle, sniper fire, and a large number of anti-tank mines all combined to hamper the progress of the battalion. When darkness closed in, the advance elements, still attempting to negotiate the trackless wilderness, were pulled back along the rail embankment to establish a defensive perimeter.

In the north that day, 3/322 attacked on the left, the 2d on the right; the 1st went into reserve. Elements of the 3d Battalion were delayed somewhat by sniper fire and wild shooting to the rear by support troops. Finally, one company, preceded by a platoon of medium tanks, moved out along the roadbed of the Pacific Railroad against stiffening enemy resistance. Supporting armor, blasting every suspicious patch of terrain that might have hidden a Japanese position, knocked out several reinforced bunkers in the process. Within two hours, the riflemen had advanced some

¹² For the sake of simplicity, the various narrow-gauge railroad spurs on Angaur were named after railroad lines in the United States, but with the nomenclature all resemblance between the two ended.

500 yards to the junction of the Southern and the Pacific Railroads. By this time, supporting fires were falling dangerously close, so the soldiers pulled back along the railroad some 75 yards, and were there joined by Company L, which had advanced behind the lead unit.

At this point occurred one of these tragic events that only too often in World War II marred a campaign that was otherwise going well. Six Navy fighter planes suddenly swept out of the skies and subjected the exposed men to heavy bombing and strafing. The full brunt of the attack fell on 3/322. Before the men could take cover or the air strike could be called off, friendly aircraft had killed 7 and wounded 46. An investigation later determined that the incident resulted from an improper marking of the target area and was not the fault of the pilots. Upon learning of the extent of the damage, General Mueller requested all air attacks against Angaur be discontinued until further notice, but this measure, aside from assuring the nonrecurrence of such a blunder for several days, could not undo the damage that had been wrought. It should be noted that on Angaur the enemy may at times have instigated and exploited such incidents.

Japanese machine gunners and snipers on Angaur used the sound of low-flying aircraft to mask their firing positions by firing only when planes passed close overhead. This led to reports from jittery troops that friendly planes were strafing them. The situation got so bad that even the air observer had to be ordered clear of the area.¹³

¹³ Col Arthur T. Mason ltr to CMC, dtd 28Feb50, in *Peleliu Comment File*.

Despite the disorganization resulting from such severe casualties as those inflicted by the ill-timed air strike, the riflemen resumed their advance within half an hour. Pushing forward rapidly the men seized the Japanese phosphate plant north of Saipan by 1400, and during the remainder of the afternoon advanced to within 300 yards of the west coast of Angaur. Infantry-tank patrols, operating in generally open terrain, reached the northern limits of Saipan Town.

To the north of the RCT 322 zone, the 2d Battalion passed through the lines of the 1st, which then reverted to regimental reserve. Orders called for the battalion to outflank the rugged hills in the northwestern portion of the island and then to move southward along the western coast until it joined up with the 3d Battalion. The advancing Wildcats encountered only light resistance, but the terrain grew progressively more rugged. Before long the supporting armor had to be withdrawn, for the broken nature of the ground precluded the use of tanks. The infantrymen doggedly plodded onward, despite intense heat. One platoon, meeting no opposition, continued to Cape Pkulangelul, which formed the northwest tip of Angaur. The regimental commander, aware of the logistical problems involved in supporting such an advanced force, and the tactical difficulties resulting from having a weak unit occupy an exposed and vulnerable position, ordered a withdrawal to Phase Line 0-2.

The 18th of September featured the unloading of necessary supplies on a large scale. The previous day, during the

confusion of the initial assault landing, beach congestion had resulted when following waves continued to dump their loads upon the already crowded beaches. As a result, a temporary halt had been called to the unloading and no attempt was made to land artillery until afternoon, when two field artillery battalions were put ashore. By morning of the 18th, all supporting artillery was in position and ready to fire.

From the intelligence reports received during the second day, General Mueller gathered that the main Japanese strength was still concentrated on southern Angaur. This belief, coupled with orders to seize the vital level area in the south to facilitate construction of the airfield, impelled the division commander to issue orders calling for a drive southward by both regiments on 19 September to overrun Saipan Town and to divide the enemy forces.

At 0730 on the 19th, following heavy preparatory fires, the two rifle regiments jumped off in a determined bid to split the island and its defending force. To the south, RCT 321 attacked with the 3d Battalion on the left, the 2d on the right, and the 1st in reserve. To the north, RCT 322 moved out with three battalions abreast, from left to right the 3d, the 1st, and the 2d. The two battalions on the right advanced southwestward in an attempt to seize all ground south of Phase Line 0-4, except for the rugged hills, which would be mopped up later by the 2d. Phase Line 0-4 extended eastward from the west coast about 600 yards north of Saipan Town to a point northeast of Saipan where it formed a juncture with Phase Line 0-3. The 2d Battalion also had the

mission of preventing any escape by the Japanese along the northern coast. The 3d Battalion was to strike directly through Saipan Town and then occupy the area between Phase Lines 0-4 and 0-5, the latter extending southeastward from Saipan Town to Beach Green II on the southeastern shore of Angaur.

Supported by medium tanks, the two assault companies of 3/322 advanced rapidly from their nighttime positions near the phosphate plant. Only sporadic mortar, machine gun, and rifle fire opposed the advance into Saipan Town. The riflemen encountered a number of enemy pillboxes, bunkers, and other fortifications, but these defenses had been designed to prevent an attack by sea only. Since the Wildcats approached them from the rear, their reduction posed no great problem.

Following capture of the town, General Mueller conducted a personal reconnaissance of the front and ordered the drive to the south continued as rapidly as possible. Leaving small details to mop up any Japanese still lurking among the shattered buildings or hiding in caves along the edge of the water, the 3d Battalion started southwards along a railroad that paralleled the shore some 30 yards inland. The fast-moving soldiers encountered only small groups of enemy troops that were quickly bypassed and, by 1600, they had set up night positions on Cape Ngaramudel and the north shore of Garangaoi Cove.

The other two battalions of RCT 322 met little difficulty in advancing south to the phosphate plant. Here, the 1st Battalion found its zone already occupied by elements of the 2d and 3d Bat-

talions and received orders to assemble as a regimental reserve. Subsequently, its mission was to guard the rear area against possible enemy infiltration. The 2d Battalion, on the other hand, reinforced with Company B of the 1st, launched an assault against the northwest hills. A rifle company quickly occupied Palomas Hill, also known as Lighthouse Hill, in the face of only negligible opposition and dispatched a patrol to reconnoiter to the front.

This patrol failed to make any headway, for devastating fire from cleverly concealed enemy positions on high ground poured down upon the advancing men. A flanking attempt by Company G, using the Western Railroad to advance from the east, was pinned down by heavy fire from Japanese entrenched in the Lake Salome area. Blocked in every forward movement and with daylight fading rapidly, the battalion pulled back to the phosphate plant to set up night positions.

To the south that day, in the RCT 321 zone, tank-infantry teams of the 2d Battalion overcame very light opposition and by 0900 had overrun Middle Village. Seizure of this settlement, some 400 yards east of Saipan Town, was contested only by occasional groups of Japanese infantrymen. Such weak resistance to the advance of the Wildcats encouraged the commanding officer of the 710th Tank Battalion to recommend an armored reconnaissance of southern Angaur.

When higher commanders concurred in his proposal, a company of medium tanks, each mounting six or more men, started rolling southward, skirting the western edge of a mangrove swamp in

the southeast portion of the island. The remaining riflemen of the 2d Battalion followed more slowly on foot. Before the day ended, this tank-infantry reconnaissance force had completely circled the swamp area—even passing through the fortified eastern beach defenses that were still holding up the advance of the 3d Battalion. Surprisingly enough, this force did not at any time encounter serious opposition. Having reached their objective, the tanks took up positions behind the lines of the 2d Battalion, which extended across the island below the swamp to tie in with 3/322 near Garangaoi Cove.

While the above action was in progress, the 3d Battalion of RCT 321 passed through the lines of the 1st Battalion in the eastern part of Angaur to strike southward from the Southern Railroad. In the course of the morning, one column pushed forward along the coast, while the other, attempting a flanking movement inland, soon ran into the mangrove swamp. Negotiating this natural obstacle prove so difficult and time-consuming that the column turned eastward to rejoin the force assaulting along the beach.

Here, the same extensive fortifications that had blunted the previous attack barred the way to the south. No sooner had the Wildcats methodically reduced one group of the mutually supporting positions than they drew fire from additional defenses farther down the coast. By early afternoon, the attack had stalled. Even a substantial increase in mortar and artillery support failed to get the advance going again.

By this time, a gap had opened between the two assault battalions of

RCT 321. To fill this void, the 1st Battalion, previously held in reserve, plunged into the morass separating the two assault units. Somehow these men managed to move far enough ahead before nightfall to set up perimeter defenses some 600 yards inland from the 3d Battalion.

That night, as General Mueller surveyed the tactical situation confronting his troops, he had every reason to feel confident. Gains for the day had surpassed his expectations, a fact also recognized by General Geiger, who dashed off the following message upon his return from a visit to the frontlines on Angaur: "The advance of your Division today reflects a commendable aggressive spirit. Well done to all hands."¹⁴ The day had also brought capture of the first Japanese prisoner, who identified his unit as the *1st Battalion, 59th Infantry Regiment, 14th Division*. According to this source, in June all Japanese troops, except for a garrison of more than a thousand, had departed for Babelthuap. If true, this intelligence was welcome news for the 81st Infantry Division, since the enemy strength was apparently less than had been anticipated. A heavy fight still lay ahead, however, before the entire island of Angaur could be secured.

There were, nevertheless, bright spots on the horizon. Already seized was the level terrain for the bomber strip, the main objective of the entire operation. It appeared unlikely that the Japanese would make any serious attempt to re-

inforce the Angaur garrison in view of the situation on Peleliu. There no longer could be any doubt of the issue on Angaur.

The first Marines to arrive on Angaur were members of a reconnaissance party of the 7th AAA Battalion, which landed on 19 September. Upon the arrival of the remainder of the battalion, the Marine unit was closely integrated in the Angaur Island defense plans, operating observation posts along the coast for waterborne targets in addition to being responsible for antiaircraft defense.

Still unaware of recent changes in Japanese defensive tactics, General Mueller, as a precautionary measure, alerted all his units to take the necessary steps to fend off any last-ditch *banzai* charges. The admonition of the division commander was to prove unnecessary. For the Japanese the time had now arrived to withdraw the major portion of their troops into the rugged, coral-ridged hills of northwest Angaur. Here the Japanese commander planned to exploit the natural terrain features to the utmost, forcing the Wildcats to root every last defending Japanese out of caves and dugouts while inflicting the heaviest casualties possible on the attacking force.

On the whole, the night of 19–20 September passed without any major incident. Division artillery blasted away at enemy positions; the ships offshore could fire only illuminating shells because of the proximity of friendly and opposing lines. Towards dawn, small, scattered remnants of the Angaur garrison began filtering through the American positions. These Japanese seemed

¹⁴ Historical Committee, *81st Infantry Division*, p. 93.

intent solely upon escaping from the doomed southern portion of the island, however, and gaining the northwestern hills where Major Goto still retained control.

Early on 20 September all three battalions of RCT 321 resumed the final drive south to wipe out the two isolated pockets of enemy resistance still remaining there, while RCT 322 continued its assault against the Japanese-held hills to the north. The 322d was forced to divert one battalion northward to assume defensive positions along the second phase line between Lake Aztec and the north coast. This force had the mission of blocking any possible Japanese counterattack against Red Beach, which at the time was still congested with supplies and materiel. Since another of his battalions was stationed below Saipan Town, the regimental commander, Colonel Benjamin W. Venable, had only his 2d Battalion available for the assault.

The soldiers moved out and soon reoccupied Palomas Hill. Upon resuming the advance, the Wildcats found themselves attacking uphill over terrain that greatly favored the defenders, who were entrenched on the commanding heights to the front of the battalion. Every attempt by men of the 2d Battalion to push forward drew such heavy enemy mortar and machine gun fire that it had to be abandoned. Even a flanking maneuver to the east, making use of the Western Railroad, whose tracks cut through the ridges surrounding Lake Salome, failed when three self-propelled 75mm guns which were supporting the rifle company, emerged from the 50-yard-long railroad cut only to be knocked out by enemy action. Except for the recap-

tured ground at Palomas Hill no additional gains were made, and the men of the 2d Battalion dug in for the night in substantially the same positions they had held on the previous day.

Further south that morning, 2/321 with two additional rifle companies and two tank companies, quickly overran the heavily fortified southern beaches. Fortunately for the attackers, these positions, previously held in strength, were now defended by a mere handful of Japanese survivors. The only stiff opposition came from some pillboxes clustered near a tank barrier at the southeastern tip of Angaur. A flame-thrower-satchel charge team soon eliminated this threat. By 1100, after detailing one company to mop up any enemy personnel that had been overlooked, the reinforced battalion was able to throw its weight against the southeast beaches, where Japanese diehards had for some time delayed the advance of the 3d Battalion.

In the center, the 1st Battalion, now reduced to just one reinforced rifle company, resumed its attack through the mangrove swamp to take the southeast beach fortifications from the rear. The difficulties of maneuvering through the seemingly impenetrable terrain soon forced these men to abandon their efforts and rejoin the 3d Battalion in its assault along the coast. This drive south encountered only isolated stubborn resistance, for most of the beach defenses were found to be unmanned. The Japanese had evacuated their positions and fled north under cover of darkness. When the 2d Battalion completed regrouping and struck at the enemy pocket from the south, the last phase of the

battle for Angaur began and the end of Japanese resistance was in sight. Only the inevitable mopping up by small details remained to be accomplished on southern Angaur. This was done the following day.

Earlier on 20 September, General Mueller had forwarded the following message to IIIAC: "All organized resistance ceased on Angaur at 1034. Island secure."¹⁵ General Mueller made this statement because Major Goto no longer had the capability of posing a serious threat to the hold of the Army on Angaur. All necessary ground for the construction of the airfield and base installations had already been seized; an estimated 850 Japanese had been killed;¹⁶ and the approximately 350 enemy troops that division intelligence figured were left had been compressed into the northwestern hills which were completely sealed off. What none of the Wildcats could visualize at this time, any more than the Marines on Peleliu, was that the elimination of such a relatively small and isolated pocket of enemy resistance would require an all-out effort by an entire infantry regiment, and that such an operation would drag on for yet another month.

The final Japanese defensive positions were located in the highest and most rugged portion of Angaur amidst the northwestern hill mass. Here the

Japanese set up a well-conceived and constructed defensive system, utilizing the broken nature of the terrain to the utmost. Caves were dug, fire lanes cleared, and the artillery, mortars, anti-tank weapons, and machine guns sited in mutually supporting positions to exploit the defensive quality of the terrain and to thwart any infantry assault. Since practically every emplacement was hidden underground, the Japanese were for all practical purposes immune to naval gunfire, artillery, or air strikes. The attackers, on the other hand, could make little use of supporting armor, for the jumbled configuration of the ridges prohibited any closely coordinated tank-infantry assault. Only the most determined rushes by American riflemen could displace the entrenched enemy from his last-ditch positions.

Once again the enemy deployment and his complete knowledge of the forbidding terrain met every attack that the Wildcats could muster. The Japanese made effective use of machine guns, rifles, antitank guns, and mortars from concealed positions on commanding ground. These weapons were fired only when the chances that the shots would find their mark were good and when it appeared that the weapons and their crews would not be seen by the attacking infantrymen. Since the Japanese used smokeless and flashless powder, the locating of a weapon by even the most alert observer was practically impossible. In short, the northwest hills of Angaur had been transformed into a virtual fortress, a miniature version of Umurbrogol Mountain on Peleliu, whose reduction was also to prove difficult, costly, and time-consuming.

¹⁵ Historical Committee, *81st Infantry Division*, p. 98.

¹⁶ "This casualty figure was an overestimation. Probably fewer than 600 Japanese had been killed through the 20th, and Major Goto still had possibly 750 men with which to conduct an organized defense in the northwest." Smith, *Approach to the Philippines*, p. 518.

Reduction of the enemy redoubt fell to RCT 322, because on 21 September the tactical situation on Peleliu made necessary the transfer of RCT 321 to that island. Further, because of the restricted area of the pocket, there was room for only one rifle regiment to maneuver. Subsequently, for over a month, the men of RCT 322 were forced to fight, live, and die among the jumbled, jungle-cloaked coral ridges, spires, and cliffs of northwestern Angaur before the last enemy holdout had been either killed or captured.

Repeated attempts were made to avoid unnecessary bloodshed by inducing the Japanese to surrender. Such incentives were offered in the form of leaflets and broadcasts in the Japanese language over a public address system. The wording of these was approximately as follows:

Japanese Soldiers: This island is surrounded by the American forces, and there is no reason for you to continue fighting against us. Further resistance is hopeless. Your communication and supply lines are cut. The Japanese Navy is far away. If you resist further, you will surely die by starvation and bombardment.

If you cease fighting and come to us immediately, one by one, unarmed and with your hands up, you will receive food, clothing, and medical care.

To die when encountered by a hopeless situation is neither heroic nor brave, and is only a useless death. Come over to us singly, unarmed, and with your hands up. We give you (time allotted) to come to us; otherwise we will be forced to take the only alternative action.¹⁷

Only a sprinkling of Japanese surrendered, one of them after the first

broadcast, and another immediately following the second. On the whole, the results obtained were disappointing and it seemed that the Japanese required more demonstration of the power of the attacking force.

This was furnished in abundance, as day after day the Wildcats doggedly returned to the assault. Frequently they suffered minor reverses and losses. Progress at times could be measured in yards and remained agonizingly slow. Still, with each passing day and hour victory came ever closer within the reach of the tired, dirty but determined assault troops. First portents of success came towards the end of the first week in October when 183 natives emerged from the pocket, many of them in deplorable physical condition and in dire need of medical attention which was promptly furnished. By this time the protracted conflict had degenerated into minor patrol action with sniping, ambushing, and extensive boobytrapping employed by both sides. The true situation did not deter the Japanese from reporting as late as 10 October that "judging from the flarebombs and other indications, it is certain that our garrison units in the northwestern hills (of Angaur) are annihilating the enemy in close quarter combat."¹⁸

Four days later, however, the assault phase on Angaur came to an end, and the occupation period began for the island. For practical purposes, tactical operations were to continue long beyond this date. The 81st Infantry Division was to retain responsibility for eliminating the remaining isolated pockets of

¹⁷ Historical Committee, *81st Infantry Division*, p. 111.

¹⁸ *Japanese CenPac Ops*, p. 132.

enemy resistance. All other control concerning Angaur was passed on 14 October from General Mueller to the island commander, Colonel Ray A. Dunn, USA, whose mission it was to develop the island as a forward airbase. On the same date the Marine 7th AAA Battalion was relieved from attachment to the 81st Infantry Division and assigned to the Angaur Garrison Force, while still remaining under operational control of the division.

The indomitable Major Goto survived every American attack right up to the night of 19 October, when his luck finally ran out and he was killed. A few other Japanese, determined to escape from an untenable situation, decided to swim to Peleliu. One actually covered the seven-mile stretch before he was observed. The fate of those Japanese remaining on Angaur was now sealed, and on 21 October triumphant Wildcats overran the last remaining organized enemy position. This action terminated the tactical phase of the operation, even though a few Japanese stragglers inevitably remained. RCT 322 was withdrawn to the southern part of Angaur for rest and recuperation, leaving only a couple of supporting units in the area to seek out and annihilate whatever Japanese still lurked there.

It is interesting to note that following the break in Japanese communications between Angaur and Peleliu on 22 September, Colonel Nakagawa continued to report the heroic deeds of the Angaur garrison even after the men of RCT 322 had relinquished their combat duties for the less strenuous atmosphere of garrison life. It was not until mid-November that Nakagawa admitted that

this continued resistance was just "his surmise."¹⁹

The Wildcats had accomplished the seizure of Angaur, killing an estimated 1,338 Japanese and capturing 59.²⁰ Losses sustained were 260 killed or dead of wounds and 1,354 wounded or injured as of 30 October 1944. An additional 940 Americans were temporarily incapacitated by battle fatigue, illness, or disease.²¹

The capture of Angaur was of prime importance because it eliminated a threat to Allied lines of communication that stretched across the western Pacific towards the Philippines. Angaur provided the Allies with another badly needed air base in a forward area. Construction of an airfield on Angaur had begun as early as 20 September, and the first aircraft touched down on the field on 15 October. It should be noted that since the island had not previously harbored any Japanese air installation the work had to start from scratch. First tasks were cutting back the jungle, filling swamps, and levelling very rough terrain.

From the Japanese point of view, the loss of Angaur and sacrifice of Major Goto's reinforced infantry battalion were more than offset by the advantages derived from this delaying action. There is evidence that General Inoue never considered Angaur as anything more than an outpost; hence his instructions to the garrison were to prolong the conflict as long as possible if attacked by a superior force. Goto's isolated battalion,

¹⁹ *Japanese Ops in the CenPac*, p. 192.

²⁰ *81st InfDiv OpRpt*, Sec IX, p. 69.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

without the benefit of or any hope of obtaining air support or reinforcements, was able to deny the prime objective on the island, the projected site for the airfield, for several days in the face of a determined assault by two American regiments receiving all the support from the air and sea that could be mustered. When deterioration of the situation forced the inevitable Japanese withdrawal, Major Goto's skillful and tenacious defense of the hills in the northwestern portion of the island tied up an entire American infantry regiment for an additional month. The reward of the Japanese garrison for its tenacity was death, but death held little terror for many fatalistic Japanese.²²

The men of the 81st Infantry Division emerged from the Angaur operation more combatwise and more certain of their ability to deal with a fanatical enemy. The lessons they had learned during the first combat action on Angaur were soon to serve the Wildcats well during the even more difficult and challenging mission awaiting them on Peleliu.

ON TO ULITHI²³

The original concept of the STALEMATE II Operation envisioned the employment of a regimental combat team

of the 81st Infantry Division to seize Angaur Island before the invasion of Peleliu got under way. Following the successful completion of this mission, it was planned that the division was to be further employed in operations against Yap, an island 258 miles northeast of the Palaus, with one RCT to be engaged in independent action under Navy control against Ulithi, an atoll about halfway between the Palaus and Yap.

Preliminary planning by the division for the consummation of this concept provided for the employment of RCT 322 on Angaur Island and RCT 321 on Ulithi Atoll. When revised estimates of enemy strength made it necessary to plan for the commitment of two RCTs on Angaur, RCT 321 was removed from consideration as the landing force to seize Ulithi and was reassigned to the Angaur assault. RCT 323 then was assigned the Ulithi operation; planning for it was begun on 1 August 1944.

As additional information about enemy strength in the Southern Palaus became available, it was apparent that the continued presence of elements of the 81st Infantry Division would be required in that area. As a consequence, on 22 August the division was relieved from participation in operations against Yap and Ulithi, and the mission of seizing the latter was assigned to a combat team of the 96th Infantry Division. Planning by the 81st Infantry Division for the Ulithi Operation ceased on that date. Further developments in the concept of the STALEMATE II Operation

²² "To die is lighter than the birds' feathers," and "to die is like the blossoms of the cherry tree falling down." LtGen Sadae Inoue in *Worden ltr.*

²³ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *81st InfDiv OpRpt—Angaur*; *81st InfDiv OpRpt—Ulithi Atoll and other Western Caroline Islands*; Marine Air Base Ulithi—Rpts and Correspondence re: Base Development Plans, dtd Oct44-Jul45; MAG-45, Rpt of Op, dtd 23Jan45, hereafter *MAG-45, Rpt of Op*; Historical Committee,

81st Infantry Division; Hough, *Assault on Peleliu*; Morison, *Leyte*; Smith, *Approach to the Philippines*.

involved abandoning the plan to capture the Yap Island Group and assigning the mission of seizing Ulithi to a combat team of the 77th Infantry Division.

On 15 September the Joint Chiefs of Staff decided to speed up the Pacific timetable of operations. Although the assault on the strongly-held Yap Island remained shelved, the seizure of Ulithi was to take place as scheduled. American planners particularly desired this atoll, since it possessed a spacious sheltered anchorage that was to serve as a forward base during the imminent invasion of the Philippines. On 16 September Admiral Halsey ordered Admiral Wilkinson to seize Ulithi "with resources on hand".²⁴

The 77th and 96th Infantry Divisions, initially scheduled for the Yap-Ulithi assault, had been transferred to General MacArthur to form part of his invasion force for the Leyte landing. Only one uncommitted regiment, RCT 323, remained under Wilkinson's control.

On 16 September General Mueller was advised that one combat team of the division would constitute the landing force to capture Ulithi. RCT 323 was designated as the landing force.

This infantry unit was then serving as IIIAC floating reserve, the sole source of combat-ready troops in the event that the Marines ran into trouble on Peleliu or the Army required assistance on Angaur. Although the commander of the Expeditionary Troops, General Julian C. Smith, recommended to Wilkinson that the rifle regiment would be needed to ensure an early seizure of the hotly contested island, the admiral did not share this conviction.²⁵

During the night following receipt of Halsey's directive, Wilkinson instructed General Mueller to ready RCT 323 for an immediate departure to assault Ulithi Atoll. The specific mission of the regiment was "to capture, occupy, and defend Ulithi Atoll in order to establish a fleet anchorage, seaplane base, and airbase thereat to support further operations against the enemy, and to commence development of the base until relieved."²⁶

The Ulithi Attack Group was commanded by Rear Admiral Blandy and consisted of a cruiser, 9 destroyers, 3 patrol vessels, 12 landing craft, gunboats, 2 high-speed troop transports, and 5 attack transports and cargo vessels.

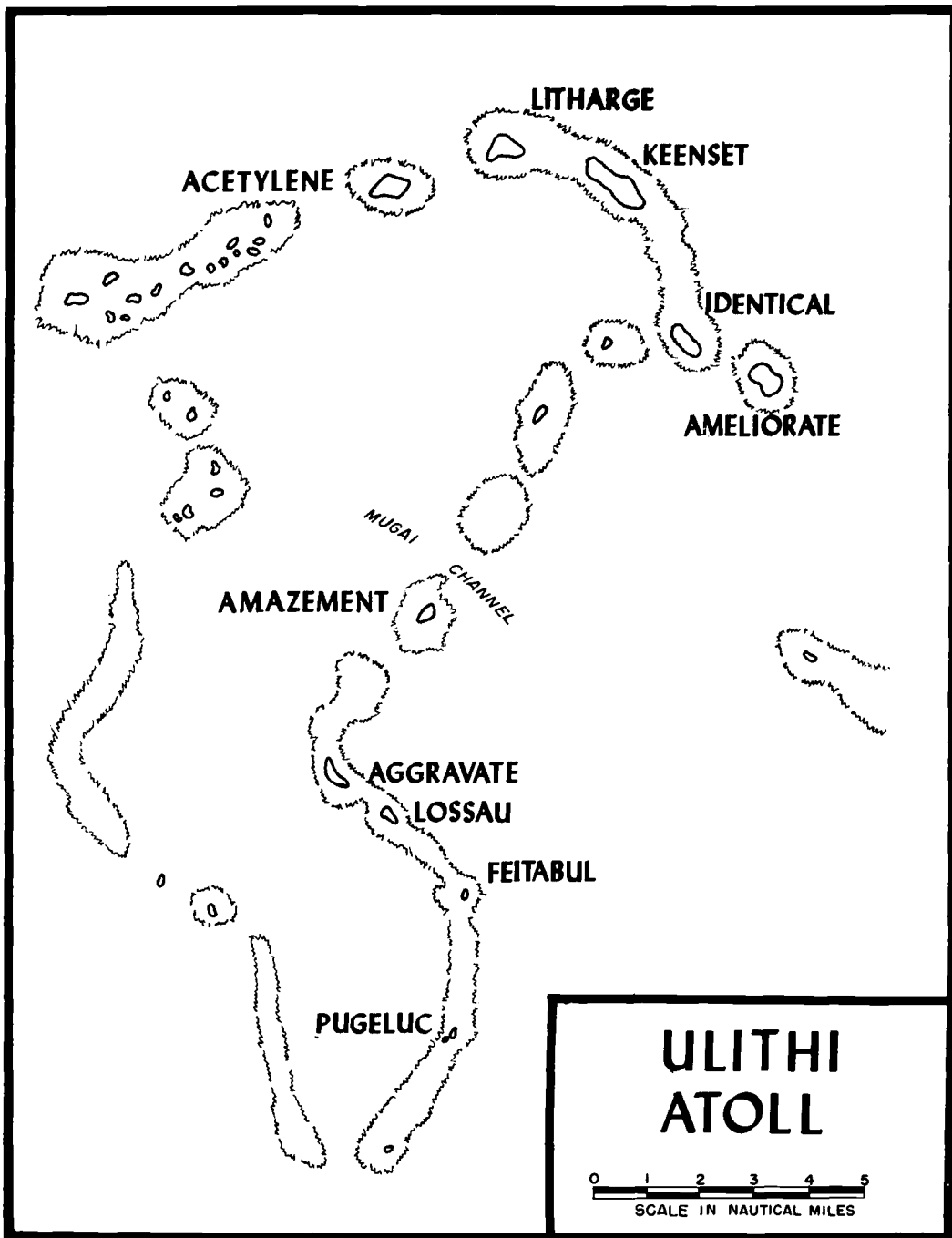
The final plan of operations presented to the Navy and approved by it provided for the landing of the reconnaissance detachment of RCT 323 on AMAZEMENT Island²⁷ prior to dawn of Jig Day minus 1. There the detachment was to establish a minor defense post in order to protect the Mugai Channel entrance into the Ulithi Lagoon, which was to serve as the transport area for the attack force (See Map 7). During the same day, a reconnaissance detach-

²⁵ "Navy officers sometimes have difficulty in understanding how idle troops can serve any useful purpose aboard ship while fighting is going on ashore." *Smith interview*.

²⁶ Attack Order No. A268-44, ComGroupOne, PhibsPac, dtd 15Sep44.

²⁷ Islands in Ulithi Atoll have been mentioned in the text by code name only. Code designations (in capital letters) were as follows: AMAZEMENT—Mangejang; KEENSET—Sorlen; LITHARGE—Mogmog; AMELIORATE—Falalop; ACETYLENE—Potangeras; AGGRAVATE—Fassarai; IDENTICAL—Asor.

²⁴ *Smith interview*.



Map 7

E.L. Wilson

ment was to be landed on one of the southern islands of the atoll to remove a few natives for intelligence purposes.

On Jig Day a reinforced rifle company was to capture KEENSET Island to permit the emplacement of the combat team artillery in support of subsequent ship to shore operations against the northern islands of the atoll. The remainder of the BLT furnishing troops for the capture of KEENSET was to be prepared to capture LITHARGE Island. Upon completion of artillery registration firing and on order, a second BLT was to capture and defend IDENTICAL Island. During these operations, reconnaissance detachments were to reconnoiter and mop-up the small islands in the west central portion of the atoll.

On Jig Day plus 1, artillery and cannon-supported shore-to-shore operations were to be carried out against AMELIORATE and ACETYLENE Islands. Reconnaissance detachments were to be prepared to assist, on order, in reconnoitering and mopping up AGGRAVATE, LOSSAU, the remaining small islands to the south, and the islets eastward of the main atoll.

The Ulithi Attack Force proceeded as planned. Troops, equipment, and supplies had been combat loaded at Oahu, Hawaii in anticipation that RCT 323 would be employed as reserve in the Palau Operation or in an assault landing on Ulithi. Movement to the objective area was made in two echelons. The reconnaissance detachment, consisting of the Intelligence & Reconnaissance Platoon, 323d Infantry Regiment, reinforced with 24 enlisted men from one of the rifle companies, departed from the Palau area at 1330, 19 September. It

arrived off Ulithi during the early morning of 21 September awaiting orders from the Commander, Ulithi Fire Support Group, under whose command the reconnaissance was to be effected. The remainder of the force departed at 1000, 21 September. Both echelons made the movement without incident.

The afternoon of 21 September saw the completion of final plans for the landing of a reconnaissance detachment on AMAZEMENT Island. Mission of this unit was to secure Mugai Channel for minesweeping and underwater demolition operations which were to be conducted in the lagoon on that date. It was decided that a preliminary offshore reconnaissance of the island was to be conducted that afternoon to determine the best beach for a landing. In the event that the reconnaissance was made without interference, troops would land that afternoon to seize the island.

The reconnaissance was carried out as planned and subsequently the reconnaissance detachment landed unopposed at 1515. A thorough search revealed no sign of recent habitation. Thirteen men stayed on the island, and the remainder returned to the ship.

During the early morning of 22 September, orders were issued to carry out a landing on AGGRAVATE Island for the purpose of removing a few natives for questioning. A detachment debarked in two rubber boats and proceeded towards the island. The entire shore was fringed with a coral reef extending out from the beach for about 150 yards. When the troops went ashore, they encountered two natives, who approached in a friendly fashion and agreed to accompany the troops back to the ship.

Their interrogation revealed that the Japanese garrison force had departed a few months earlier and that there were no Japanese on the atoll except for a crippled one on AMELIORATE Island. A thorough search of KEENSET Island failed to reveal any sign of recent occupation, though several Japanese graves were found. A search of LITHARGE Island likewise showed negative results.

During the morning of 23 September, elements of RCT 323 landed unopposed on AMELIORATE, which was officially declared secure at 1315. Once again no Japanese were found on the island, not even the reported cripple. A considerable number of inhabitants had taken refuge in a shallow cave in the northwestern part of AMELIORATE. After much coaxing about 30 natives were persuaded to return to their homes in the village. For the remainder of the day and throughout the next natives continued to leave their hiding places. In all, about 100 returned to the village.²⁸

Occupation of IDENTICAL Island commenced at 1300, 23 September, when assault waves came ashore and found neither enemy nor natives on the island, though the bodies of two Japanese, apparently dead for several days, were discovered floating in shallow water. The seizure of LITHARGE and ACETYLENE Islands rounded out the operation, which was to become prominent for the absence of enemy resistance.

Ulithi Atoll contained a 300-berth anchorage and a seaplane base. Occupa-

tion of these Western Caroline islands provided still another base from which future operations against the enemy could be supported. The construction of an airstrip on AMELIORATE Island made possible fighter plane protection for the anchorage and afforded a base from which U. S. aircraft could continue neutralization of the nearby Japanese bases on Yap.

Together with Angaur and Peleliu Islands to the southwest and Guam, Tinian, and Saipan to the northeast, the capture of Ulithi Atoll completed a line of American bases that isolated Japanese holdings in the Central and South Pacific. The occupation of Ulithi Atoll further denied it to the enemy as a fleet anchorage, weather and radio station, and possible air and submarine base, in addition to precluding its use by the enemy to observe and report the activities of American forces in the sector.

By 25 September the unloading of all the support ships had been completed and Vice Admiral John H. Hoover, Commander, Forward Areas Western Pacific, took over the task of developing Ulithi Atoll into an advanced fleet base. Within a month after the capture of Ulithi, more than a hundred Navy craft from self-propelled types to lighters, floating drydocks, barges, landing craft, and seaplane wrecking derricks were en route to the island. During subsequent operations in the Philippines, the U. S. Pacific Fleet found Ulithi to be an extremely valuable base. Prior to the invasion of Okinawa, the island served as a staging area for fleet and amphibious forces. The atoll thus fulfilled a vital strategic role in the final phase of World War II.

²⁸ 81st InfDiv OpRpt, Ulithi, p. 17. According to Historical Committee, *81st Infantry Division*, no Japanese or natives were encountered on AMELIORATE.

Securing the North: 23-30 September¹

REINFORCEMENT FOR PELELIU²

Major General William H. Rupertus, commanding the 1st Marine Division, initially envisioned the Peleliu operation as a tough but short campaign. The landings took place on 15 September under weather conditions that were ideal except for excessive heat. Despite fanatical Japanese resistance, the Marines secured a firm foothold on the island. The 5th Marines seized the prime objective of the operation, the vital Peleliu airfield, on the second day of the assault, while the 7th Marines accomplished the mission of driving the Japanese from the southern part of the island. The 1st Marines had already encountered the fringes of the vast enemy defense system in the central ridges of Peleliu, and early optimistic reports soon gave way to a more somber perspective of the situation. During the first week of operations the 1st Marines had borne the brunt of the assault. There was little likelihood that the campaign

would become easier or less costly as it progressed.

Even the most pessimistic predictions of the difficulties that the Marines were to encounter proved conservative when the full extent of the Japanese defensive system was revealed to the assault troops. By evening of 20 September, having made only minor gains, the 1st Marines found progress blocked by ridges honeycombed with elaborate Japanese defenses consisting of layers of caves, dugouts, and cleverly concealed emplacements. Worse still, in five days of incessant fighting, the regiment had sustained nearly 1,700 casualties or more than half its original strength. The 5th and 7th Marines had suffered fewer casualties, but their advance was also stymied by the heavily fortified ridges. To most division personnel, there appeared the sobering realization that the attack had bogged down in the incredibly tough and skillfully defended terrain. The division paid an extremely heavy price of nearly 4,000 casualties for the ground that had been seized. The heavy losses in personnel resulted in a corresponding reduction in the combat efficiency of the division, which as early as 18 September had dropped from "excellent" to "very good." By evening of 19 September, continued casualties and fatigue further reduced the efficiency of the 1st Marine Division.

On 21 September, General Geiger, accompanied by members of his staff, vis-

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this chapter is derived from: *IIIAC Palau Rpt*; *1st MarDiv SAR*; *1st MarDiv WarD*, Sep44; *1st MarDiv D-2 Jnl*; *1st MarDiv D-3 Periodic Rpt*; *Peleliu Comment File*; *Japanese CenPac Ops*; Smith, *Narrative*; Hough, *Assault on Peleliu*; Morison, *Leyte*; Smith, *Approach to the Philippines*; McMillan, *The Old Breed*.

² Additional sources used for this section are: *IIIAC C-3 Rpts*; *3/1 WarD*; *Vandegrift Letters*.

ited the CP of the 1st Marines to obtain a clearer picture of the situation.

It became rapidly apparent that the regimental commander was very tired, he was unable to give a very clear picture of what his situation was and when asked by the Corps Commander what he needed in the way of help he stated that he was doing all right with what he had.³

General Geiger and staff then proceeded to the division CP. After a look at the casualty reports, General Geiger told the division commander that, in his estimation, "the First Marines were finished."⁴ In the course of the ensuing discussion with General Rupertus, General Geiger expressed the view that the 1st Marines should be relieved and replaced by an Army regiment. The division commander attempted to forestall such action by asserting that the island could be secured in another day or two without the employment of Army troops, a patently impossible solution in view of the overall tactical situation. In the end, General Geiger ordered preparations made for the evacuation of the 1st Marines to the Russells and for the immediate attachment of a regiment of the 81st Infantry Division to the 1st Marine Division.

Reluctance on the part of the Commanding General, 1st Marine Division, to use Army units was not limited to this instance. It may have been rooted in earlier experiences, which did not always result in harmonious relations with Army commanders.⁵ On the other

hand, General Rupertus may have distrusted a division that was new to combat and felt that the battle-hardened 1st Marine Division was capable of finishing the job it had undertaken without any help.

Prior to this latter incident [involving attachment of an infantry regiment to the 1st Marine Division], "the Corps Commander was disinclined to impose any particular line of action upon the division commander although more than once he had felt the urge to do so. Just what induced this reluctance on the part of General Rupertus was never understood by Corps. . . ." It is probable that he felt, like most Marines, that he and his troops could and would handle any task assigned to them without asking for outside help.⁶

At 1625, 21 September, IIIAC asked the Commanding General, 81st Infantry Division, if he could make a regimental combat team available for immediate movement to Peleliu to assist the 1st Marine Division in completing the seizure of the island. Within the hour General Mueller replied that the 321st Infantry Regiment was available as soon as it could complete its re-supply. Shortly thereafter, a group consisting of Rear Admiral George H. Fort, commander of the Western Attack Force, and Major Generals Julian C. Smith and Geiger arrived at division headquarters to confer with General Mueller. These four discussed the situation on Peleliu in detail and agreed on a general plan of movement for the 321st Infantry Regiment. Shortly before midnight, 21

³ Col William F. Coleman ltr to CMC, n.d., in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Coleman ltr*.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ MajGen William H. Rupertus ltrs to LtGen Alexander A. Vandegrift (CMC), dtd 7Dec43,

4Feb44, 18Feb44, and 24Mar44, in *Vandegrift Letters*.

⁶ *Wachtler ltr.*

September, the reinforced regiment received orders directing its loading and movement to Peleliu.

The Assistant Division Commander of the 81st Infantry Division, Brigadier General Marcus B. Bell, was designated liaison representative to IIIAC, to coordinate details of the movement from Angaur to Peleliu and attachment of RCT 321 to the 1st Marine Division. On 22 September an advance detachment of the regiment arrived at Headquarters, 1st Marine Division, near the airfield, to complete the necessary arrangements for the reception and disposition of troops. On the same date, the Commanding Officer, 321st Infantry Regiment, Colonel Robert F. Dark, reported to General Geiger on board the USS *Mt. McKinley* and then proceeded to the 1st Marine Division command post on Peleliu.

The main body of the 321st Infantry Regiment embarked early on 22 September. Embarkation of all troops and loading of equipment, except for amphibian tractors, continued throughout the day and was finally completed by 1630. The ships stood off Angaur during the night of 22-23 September. Shortly after daybreak the amphibian tractors were loaded into LSTs. The force departed from Angaur at 1000 and two hours later reached Orange Beach, Peleliu. Attached to the regiment were an engineer battalion less one company, two medical companies less two platoons, an amphibian tractor company, and Company A, 710th Tank Battalion, an 81mm Provisional Mortar Platoon, and several detachments of service troops. Upon landing at Peleliu, the first elements of RCT 321 to reach the island proceeded to the

western shore, where 2/321 relieved remnants of 3/1 between 1400 and 1500.

No advance for the 1st Marines had been ordered for 23 September. Patrols pushed 1,000 yards northward along the west coast without encountering serious opposition. The areas directly behind the Marine lines were harassed by mortar and sniper fire from the high ridges to the east. In a last skirmish prior to its relief, Company L, 3d Battalion, was able to inflict heavy casualties on a large body of Japanese moving up a draw across the front towards Company I. The enemy force was wiped out by combined artillery and mortar fire.⁷

The relief of the remainder of the 1st Marines was effected quickly. All maps, overlays, and other information pertaining to the terrain and enemy positions were turned over to the Army unit, which had no maps of the area.⁸ The exhausted and depleted Marine regiment then moved out on foot or with such transportation as was available to a rest area on Purple Beach. There the units were reorganized and assigned defense sectors, which included the eastern coast of Peleliu and three islands offshore.

The men had hardly settled along Purple Beach before Colonel Puller informed them that they would go back into action after a three-day rest.⁹ This was not the intention of the division, however, and the regiment retained its defensive mission until departure from Peleliu on the last day of September. Since coming ashore, the 1st Marines

⁷ *1st MarHist*, 23Sep44.

⁸ *3/1 WarD*, 23Sep44.

⁹ McMillan, *The Old Breed*, p. 319.



MEN AND SUPPLIES arrive across 500-yard reef off Peleliu. (USMC 95606)



81st INFANTRY DIVISION troops join the battle of Peleliu. (USMC A96738)

had suffered 1,672 casualties. In the 1st Battalion 71 percent of total strength had become casualties. Similarly, the casualty rate reached 56 percent in the 2d, 55 percent in the 3d, and 32 percent of authorized strength in regimental headquarters and Weapons Company.¹⁰

During the remainder of its stay on Peleliu, the depleted 1st Marines in its rest area was able to account for a few snipers and a number of Japanese stragglers attempting to flee through the shallow water from the large peninsula across the bay. In this manner the regiment remained in action against the enemy until the very last day of its stay on the island.

In relieving the 1st Marines near Ngarekeukl on the West Road, the 3d Battalion, 321st Infantry Regiment, moved into positions directly south of the 2d Battalion, which had occupied the lines previously held by 3/1. The 1st Battalion occupied an assembly area to the rear, where it was kept in regimental reserve.

CHANGE OF MAIN EFFORT¹¹

The arrival of an additional regiment on Peleliu ushered in a new phase in the bitter contest for the island. Even though, in the estimate of the 1st Marine Division, about two thirds of the original Japanese garrison had been put out of action, organized resistance was far from over. Driving the Japanese defenders from the Umurbrogol ridges, as well as the remainder of the central ridge system, promised to be a

costly and time-consuming task. From their positions in and on the hills, the Japanese were able to interdict all movement along the East and West Roads, which generally paralleled the island coastlines north of the airfield. Just north of Peleliu, the island of Ngesebus and its fighter strip were still in Japanese hands. Enemy strength in the remaining Palau islands still exceeded 25,000. As a result, the possibility of an enemy counterlanding was ever present. It had become abundantly clear that failure of the 1st Marine Division to score a breakthrough had resulted in a loss of momentum, which would have to be recovered before the Japanese hold on the island could be eliminated.

General Rupertus had for some time considered the possibility of launching a drive up the west coast of Peleliu to outflank the main Japanese defenses on the island. If successful, such an operation would open the dual possibility of attacking the Japanese center of resistance simultaneously from the north and south, and of crossing over a narrow body of water to Ngesebus to seize that island and its fighter strip.

In the minds of General Rupertus and his staff uncertainty prevailed as to Japanese intentions of sending reinforcements and materiel to Peleliu. Evidence on that score was conflicting. As early as 18 September two Japanese barges and one sampan had been observed unloading on the northwest coast of Peleliu. On the other hand, during the first week following the landing of the 1st Marine Division on Peleliu, repeated air searches of the islands to the north had shown no evidence of enemy movements to reinforce Peleliu.

¹⁰ *1st MarHist*, 26Aug-10Oct44.

¹¹ Additional sources used for this section are: *IIIAC C-2 Rpts*; 1st MarDiv FO 3-44.

There was no uncertainty on Babelthuap, for the Japanese were ready to reinforce their hard-pressed garrison on Peleliu. This mission fell to the *2d Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment*. From a military standpoint, General Inoue was not enthusiastic about sending this unit, because he believed that the Americans would attack Koror and Babelthuap once the operation on Peleliu had been concluded. His reason for reinforcing Peleliu was "for the sake of the garrison at Peleliu and to bolster the morale of the troops there."¹²

An advance detachment of the Japanese battalion left Babelthuap during the night of 22-23 September and stealthily headed for the northern tip of Peleliu. The Japanese felt that chances of detection were slight, for the first sustained rain since the beginning of the Peleliu operation fell throughout the night. The Marines on Peleliu likewise welcomed the rain:

During our first days on Peleliu rain proved an aid to fighting troops rather than a hindrance; the sandy ground absorbing the water readily and preventing any problem of mud. Rainfall increased the available water supply and provided a welcome break in the energy-sapping heat.¹³

The Japanese were not to reach their destination undetected. At 0535, the destroyer *H. L. Edwards* spotted seven enemy barges about 1,000 yards northeast of Akarakoro Point at the northern tip of Peleliu, obviously headed for the island. The destroyer opened fire, sinking one barge before the remainder

reached the beach. A combination of bombing and strafing, naval gunfire, and artillery hit the barges on the beach, and by 0845 the cruiser *Louisville* reported all barges destroyed.

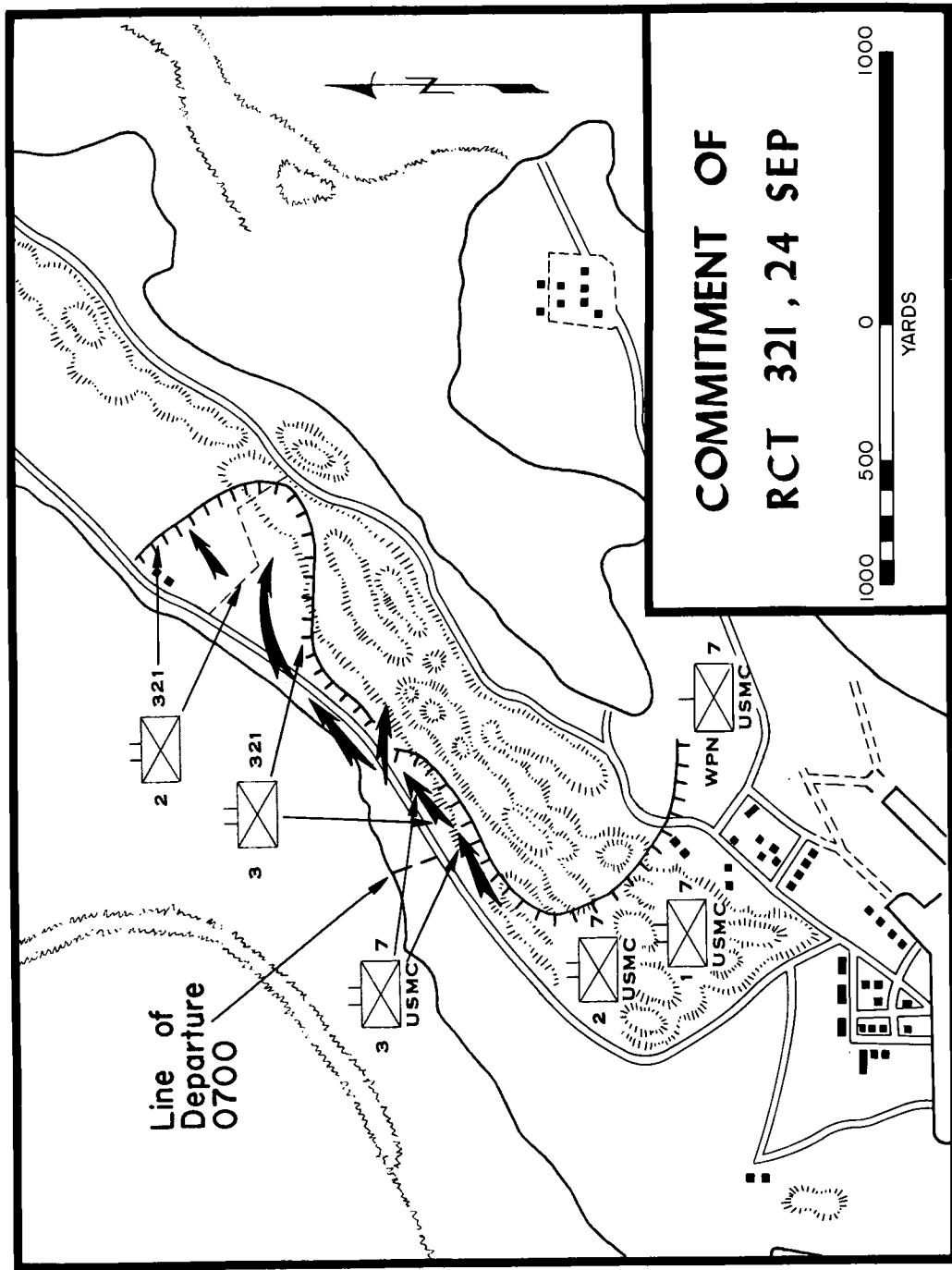
The enemy version of this incident agrees only in part with the American account, adding that "despite receiving severe enemy air and artillery fire at a point two kilometers off the coast, they made a successful landing at 0520 hours under the command of 1st Lieutenant Murahori".¹⁴

Aware of the fact that at least some Japanese reinforcements were reaching Peleliu and still uncertain as to the extent to which the Japanese might support their garrison on the island, General Rupertus on 23 September faced a difficult tactical decision. If the enemy had any weak spot on Peleliu, it was bound to be situated between the central ridges and the western shore. It was here that General Rupertus decided to commit the 321st Infantry Regiment in a drive up the western coast of the island. Such an advance would take the regiment northward from Phase Line O-3 to O-4 (See Map 8). The line of departure for the attack was located about 1,000 yards north of Ngarekeukl. The drive was to continue until a point north of the village of Garekoru was reached. During the advance, the left flank of the regiment was to remain anchored on the beach, while the right was to extend about 250 yards east of the West Road into the ridges of the Umurbrogol. The 1st and 2d Battalions, 7th Marines, were to support the Army drive by pressing against the Japanese

¹² LtGen Sadae Inoue, IJA, interview with LtCol Waite W. Worden, in *Worden ltr.*

¹³ *1st MarDiv SAR*, Ph II, Anx A, p. 7.

¹⁴ *Japanese CenPacOps*, p. 109.



E. L. Wilson

Map 8

positions from the south and center, while 3/7 would advance to the right rear of RCT 321 over the high ground to cover the advance of the soldiers. If the situation called for bypassing the central Japanese defenses, the troops advancing northward were to remain on the lookout for any route that would permit the isolation of the Umurbrogol region from the north. The attack was to jump off at 0700, 24 September.¹⁵

The narrow coastal plain of western Peleliu, where RCT 321 was to operate during the drive to the north, varied in width between 50 and 750 yards. At the southern end of the West Road, where the soldiers relieved the 1st Marines, the coastal plain was about 500 yards wide. About halfway up the western coast of the island at a point where the coastal plain attained a width of 750 yards, was the village of Garekoru. Just south of the village an unimproved trail led eastward through the hills until it connected with the East Road. From its widest point near Garekoru the plain narrowed down to the north until its width near the northern tip of Peleliu was only about 50 yards.

Vegetation varied considerably on the west side of the island. To the south of Garekoru exposed coral was covered with dense tropical underbrush and trees. To the north of the village the soil and vegetation changed in character. The coral was gradually replaced by sand, and the tropical jungle gave way to coconut palms. From the point where the attack was to jump off on the morning of 24 September, slightly more than 6,000 yards separated the 321st Infan-

try Regiment from the northern tip of Peleliu. The broken, jagged coral cliffs dominating the western plain were honeycombed with Japanese defenses, which consisted of dugouts and caves extending from the very base to the tops of ridges, varying in elevation between 50 and 200 feet. Clearly, all the advantages of cover and concealment accrued to the defenders.

For the soldiers and men of the 7th Marines, the drive to northern Peleliu promised to be an arduous undertaking. Once again the stamina, aggressiveness, and raw courage of the men in the assault were to be pitched against the fanatical determination of a well provisioned foe who preferred death to surrender.

ISOLATING THE UMURBROGOL POCKET¹⁶

During the afternoon of 23 September, the 2d Battalion, 321st Infantry Regiment, occupied positions about 700 yards north of the airfield along the West Road. The 3d Battalion was echeloned closely behind it for immediate support. The 1st Battalion, designated as regimental reserve, was located in the vicinity of the regimental command post.

To obtain a more detailed picture of the tactical situation in his zone of attack, Colonel Dark dispatched patrols northward between the West Road and the seashore. Other patrols from 3/1 had previously reconnoitered this

¹⁵ 1st MarDiv FO 3-44.

¹⁶ Additional sources used for this section are: *IIIAC C-2 Rpts*; *81st InfDiv OpRpts*; *7thMar R-2 Jnl*; *VMF(N)-541 Hist*; *2/11 SAR*; *3/7 Rec of Events*.

ground, having advanced to Garekoru without meeting any heavy resistance. Nevertheless, the movements were observed by the Japanese occupying the ridges to the east of the road, whose fire on the patrols was without noticeable effect. At Garekoru the patrols encountered numerous land mines, aerial bombs emplaced as land mines, and a few defensive positions which were not being held in strength. At 1700, the patrols reported the entire area from Phase Line 0-3 to Garekoru free of Japanese.

The receipt of such an optimistic report impelled General Rupertus to advance his timetable for the drive, scheduled to get under way on the morning of 24 September. RCT 321 received orders to send one battalion forward at once with the mission to advance to Phase Line 0-4 and dig in for the night. The task was assigned to 2/321, which began to move north at 1730. One company, moving forward between the West Road and the coast, was able to advance unopposed under the cover of a low ridge. The Japanese on the central ridges promptly spotted the company advancing east of the road as it attempted to move over open ground. The unit drew such a heavy volume of rifle and machine gun fire that the advance promptly ground to a halt before it had made much headway. Even though it had not as yet drawn any enemy fire, the company on the left halted after an advance of 100 yards to maintain contact with the unit on its right. The fading hours of daylight found both companies withdrawing to their starting points, where they dug in for the night, after establishing a continuous line of defense.

Aside from the combat action along the western coast of Peleliu, several other developments had taken place on the island in the course of the day. On the beaches and at the airfield the combat engineers had continued the removal of bombs, mines, and duds. They cleared the main beach for about 1,000 yards, laid out perimeter roads around the airstrip, and constructed a road from the south end of the airfield to Scarlet Beach. Temporary repairs on the fighter strip were completed, as was a dispersal area for 9 night fighters and 24 day-fighter aircraft. Work had begun on the southwest half of the bomber strip and a temporary control tower was half finished. The urgency of work on the airfield was emphasized during the afternoon when a B-24, the first plane larger than a TBF to land on the Peleliu strip, made an emergency landing.

The relative quiet that settled over the island with the approach of darkness on 23 September was shattered by alerts that were sounded at 1823 and 1900. No enemy aircraft appeared, however, and no bombs were dropped. During an otherwise quiet night, an enemy mortar shell landed in the CP of 3/7, causing one casualty.

For the Japanese on Babelthuap the arrival of nightfall marked the time when the main body of the *2d Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment* could begin its embarkation for Peleliu. Versions of what transpired as the Japanese approached the northern tip of Peleliu differ. According to the Japanese:

The main body of our reinforcement force [*2d Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment*] left the Palau Proper Islands on the



CORSAIR BEING READIED *for napalm attack on enemy positions in the Umurbrogol.*
(USMC 100375)



JAPANESE RIDGE POSITIONS *on Peleliu under air attack.* (USMC 98401)

night of the 23d. Nine of our landing barges arrived safely, but six of them were shelled and burned when taking the wrong landing route. However, most of the personnel in those six barges were able to land by walking in the shallows.¹⁷

According to the American account of the action:

. . . during the night from 23-24 September, there was again considerable enemy barge activity to the north, with seven craft sighted in that area, attempting to reinforce the island. They were sighted at approximately 0330 on the morning of 24 September and were brought under our naval and artillery fire. LVT(A)s also were active in the northern waters, taking the barges under close-range fire. All the enemy craft were reported sunk.¹⁸

One of the units playing a major role in combatting the Japanese barges was 2/11, which at 0500 commenced firing on enemy barges approaching from the north and apparently heading for the northeastern tip of Peleliu. Destroyers also opened fire on the craft and kept them illuminated with star shells. An observer reported that the effect of the fire was excellent. He counted 8 or 10 barges sunk or damaged and saw many people swimming about the debris. Throughout the morning of 24 September, fire was placed on survivors who were attempting to wade ashore on Peleliu. The Japanese tendency to bunch up increased the effectiveness of the artillery fire. Final reports were that 11 barges had either been sunk or disabled.¹⁹

A prisoner of war, identified as a member of the engineer unit of the *2d Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment*, shed further light on the incident. According to him, the barges intercepted off Peleliu the previous morning had carried most of the supplies of the *2d Battalion*, whereas the second echelon carried mostly troops. This prisoner estimated that 600 Japanese had gone ashore either on northeastern Peleliu or on small islands in the area.

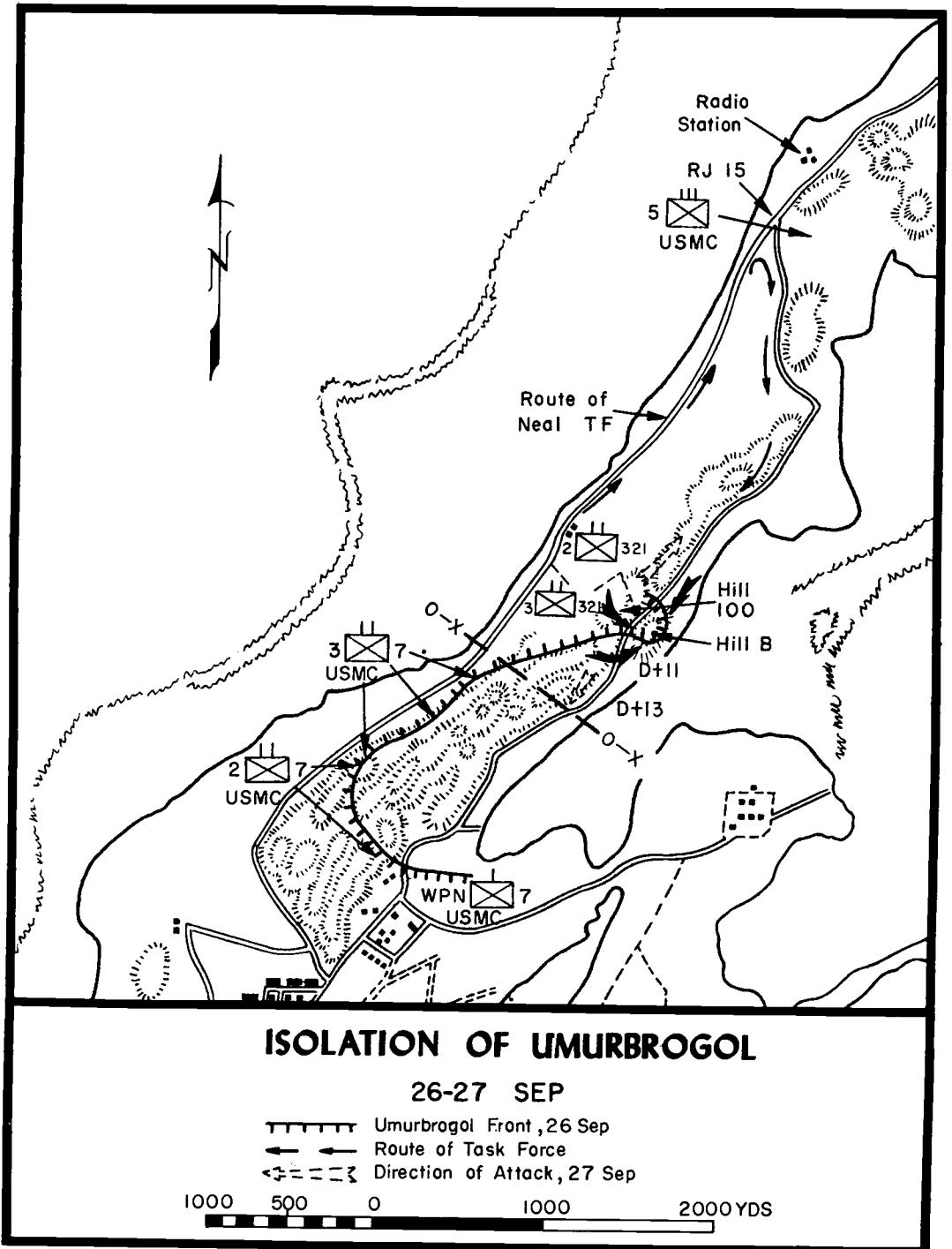
Shortly before 0600, 24 September, an air, naval, and field artillery preparation was directed against the west side of the central ridges and suspected Japanese positions near Garekoru. At 0700, the 2d Battalion, 321st Infantry Regiment, jumped off in an attack designed to seize the area west of the central ridges to a line about 500 yards north of Garekoru. The 3d Battalion followed the attacking 2d in column. The beginning of the attack saw 3/7 echeloned to the right rear of the 2d Battalion, RCT 321, with the mission of screening the right flank of the advancing infantry.

This advance initially progressed on schedule as far as those elements moving through the coastal plain were concerned. Despite moderate small arms and mortar fire, the leading elements of 2/321 reached the junction of the West Road and a trail leading eastward by noon. (See Map 9). Fully aware of the importance of this juncture, the Japanese had established positions here that were more formidable than anything the infantrymen had encountered during the morning's advance. In a brief but violent action, the 2d Battalion overcame the Japanese at the road-trail

¹⁷ *Japanese CenPacOps*, p. 109.

¹⁸ *1st MarDiv SAR*, Anx A, p. 7.

¹⁹ *2/11 AR*, 24Sep44.



junction. Ejection of the defenders from this strongpoint resulted in the capture of an antitank gun, three machine guns, and a naval gun. The 2d Battalion continued its advance up the road to Garekoru, leaving rear elements to explore the trail, which later was to assume major significance. In its rapid northward advance, the battalion reached Phase Line 0-4 to the north of Garekoru in midafternoon, when it halted, having reached the day's objective.

Elsewhere and particularly along the right flank, the advance did not proceed as envisioned. The rapid progress of 2/321 over the road had caused 3/7, moving over the ridges on the right, to fall behind. As a result, elements of 3/321 were sent up to the ridges to fill the gap. Soon, these elements ran into strong opposition along the low ridge that paralleled and dominated the road from a distance of 50 yards. In the face of strong opposition from this elevation, the infantry later pulled its right flank off the ridge and advanced up the coastal road. According to the Army version of the incident, withdrawal from the ridge occurred because the troops there wanted to maintain contact with the rest of the battalion.²⁰

Regardless of the reasons leading to the withdrawal of troops from this vital terrain feature, it appeared likely that the Japanese might take advantage of the situation and reoccupy the ridge, a possibility that was glaringly apparent to the commanding officer of 3/7, who was anxiously watching this development.

It was perfectly obvious to anyone who stood on that ridge that its control by the Japs could have been disastrous to the whole effort. We had been ordered to maintain contact with them [RCT 321] by trailing their right flank in column along the crest of the ridge from the point where we had earlier tied in with 3/1. I myself was at this boundary when the movement by 3/321 commenced and I personally saw the whole thing. They moved forward along the ridge a few yards until they encountered the first enemy positions, then gave it all up as a bad idea, and bore sharply to their left front to the coastal road below. It was certainly not our mission to maintain the contact with them on the flat coastal road and turn the ridge over to the Japs. I therefore reported what I had seen immediately to CO, CT-7, as well as CO 3/321. The latter officer . . . promised that he would do everything within his power to get them back on the high ground. I watched several abortive efforts to do so before finally becoming convinced that if friendly troops were going to control the ridge that night it would have to be our I Company.²¹

At 1310, 3/7 informed regiment that Company K had been committed on the right of the battalion, while Company I had been committed on the left. In his report to the regiment Major Hurst emphasized that 3/321 had withdrawn from the hills towards the road, leaving an undefended gap on the left flank of 3/7, that the Japanese had occupied the hills, and that 3/7 was fighting to retake them.²²

Five minutes later, while Company I was reoccupying the ridge, Captain Fer-

²¹ LtCol Edward H. Hurst ltr to CMC, dtd 15Mar50, in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Hurst ltr II*.

²² 7th Mar R-2 Jnl, 24Sep44.

²⁰ Smith, *Approach to the Philippines*, p. 537.

guson, CO of the company, was killed.²³ Shortly before 1500, 3/7 reestablished contact with the Army units on the West Road. As a result of their taking the initiative to recapture the vacated ridge, the Marines eliminated a serious threat to the flank of the advancing Army units at a cost of 17 casualties.

In the course of the afternoon, the leading elements of 3/321 probed the central ridges north of the Marines in an attempt to discover a route leading eastward. One company of infantry was finally able to gain a foothold on the first ridge line east of the road and about 600 yards south of Phase Line 0-4. The main body of the battalion remained in the proximity of West Road during the night. At 1700, Company L, 3/7, relieved Company I, which went into bivouac as battalion reserve. At 1800, 3/7 dug in for the night on a 400-yard front with Company L on the left and Company K on the right.²⁴

The 2d Battalion, RCT 321, reached Phase Line 0-4 by midafternoon of 24 September. For the remainder of the day, the battalion pushed aggressive patrols up the West Road. A strong combat patrol, supported by Marine and Army tanks, moved northward against negligible opposition for nearly 2,000 yards. At this point, the patrol had nearly reached Phase Line 0-5. From their vantage point the soldiers saw the extensive Japanese radio installations, which were situated about 600 yards north of Phase Line 0-5, and numerous Japanese pillboxes, caves, and other defenses along West Road. Before dark

the patrol withdrew to Garekoru without having encountered serious enemy resistance.

In the meantime, Company G, the leading unit of the 2d Battalion, began organizing for defense to protect the north flank of the regiment. Hardly had this defense been established when, at 1700, the enemy counterattacked and forced the 2d Battalion to withdraw about 200 yards. The infantrymen promptly retook this ground. A second enemy counterattack shortly after 1800 disintegrated before it ever got started when effective artillery concentrations were placed on the assembly area.²⁵

Aside from the activity which took place along West Road, the most far-reaching action on 24 September was destined to occur to the east of the road, and just south of the village of Garekoru, where the advancing infantry had earlier in the day discovered a poorly defined trail leading eastward into the enemy-held ridges. For lack of a better name, and because elements of RCT 321 had been the first to encounter it, the route was designated the "321st Infantry Trail."²⁶

Since this trail could represent the only lateral link between the West and East Roads on Peleliu, its tactical importance was immediately apparent. From the point where it branched off from the West Road, the trail led through a stretch of swampland before ascending into the enemy-held ridges. Patrols cautiously followed the trail as it meandered into the high ground, encountering only negligible resistance. In

²³ 3/7 *Rec of Events*, 24Sep44.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ 81st *InfDiv OpRpt*, 24Sep44.

²⁶ Historical Committee, 81st *Infantry Division*, p. 139.

order to take advantage of what could prove a weak spot in the Japanese defenses, Colonel Dark dispatched an infantry company of 2/321 along the trail.

As the company advanced into the ridges, Japanese resistance stiffened, particularly on Hill 100, which dominated the route of advance and blocked the progress of the company to the east. Since this hill, which formed the northern bastion of the Japanese pocket in the Umurbrogol ridges, dominated not only the 321st Infantry Trail but also the East Road, its capture assumed major importance. In a brief but bitter engagement, the infantrymen seized the hill and then grimly held on against all Japanese attempts to retake it. Fully aware of the decisive importance of holding the hill and, if possible, of gaining further ground to the south, Colonel Dark diverted most of the 3d Battalion to the east. Soon three additional infantry companies were attacking eastward along the trail into the area south of Hill 100. Before nightfall, the 3d Battalion had seized an escarpment south of Hill 100 and established contact with 3/7 farther to the southeast.

By evening of 24 September, it appeared that the lack of momentum which had forestalled practically all forward movement for several days, had ended. From his new division command post in the former Japanese administration building at the northern edge of the airstrip, General Rupertus pondered his next move.²⁷ The advances made during the day had surpassed his expectations, and the tactical situation had

radically changed for the better since morning. In addition, the sweep up the coast had brought a new high in the number of enemy prisoners, three being taken during the day.²⁸

On the other hand, the successes achieved during the day were accompanied by difficult problems of evacuation and supply. Army engineers, already fully occupied in clearing Garekoru of mines and boobytraps, had to improve both the narrow West Road and the 321st Infantry Trail, a job that continued after darkness during the night of 24-25 September. The men on the escarpment south of Hill 100 faced an even greater predicament, since they had to manhandle all supplies going to their exposed positions. During the return trip the supply party encountered staggering difficulties in evacuating the wounded over the inhospitable terrain. Yet the advantages gained by the day's advance far surpassed all resulting problems.

Elsewhere on Peleliu, extensive work on the airstrip had progressed to the point where the short southeast-northwest runway was fully restored. Even though heavy fighting still was in progress about two thousand yards to the north, a large number of aircraft were able to land, including two C-46s, one C-47, four PBYS, and the first echelon of VMF(N)-541, consisting of eight Hellcats. Henceforth the night fighters would be available for night operations.²⁹

For the continued operations the following day, 3/7 shifted Company I from

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *1st MarDiv SAR*, Anx A, p. 8.

²⁹ *VMF(N)-541 Hist*, Feb44-Apr46.

battalion reserve to the left of Company L, a maneuver designed to extend the line held on the ridges an additional 250 yards to the north. The 1st Battalion was ordered to move up on the West Road, where it was to remain in Support of 3/321 until an opportunity arose to shift direction and advance southward into the central ridges.

There were no reports of night activity in any sector of the 1st Marine Division.³⁰ Lest an erroneous impression be created that everything on Peleliu was entirely quiet, some action continued intermittently throughout the night. At 2200, Japanese threw hand grenades in front of the 3/7 sector.³¹ Also during the night, Japanese with demolitions fastened to their bodies, tried to infiltrate the 7th Marines lines. One Japanese, killed 10 feet in front of a half-track, was found in the morning, a Molotov cocktail tied to one leg, explosives fastened to his back, and grenades stored in his pockets.³²

The plan of operations for 25 September was to cut across the island near the 321st Infantry Trail. This maneuver would complete the isolation of Japanese forces in the Umurbrogol ridges. At 0700 elements of 2/321 jumped off from Hill 100 and in midmorning reached the edge of the East Road. Enemy resistance during this advance remained moderate and consisted primarily of rifle and machine gun fire from a key height across the East Road known as Hill B. The infantrymen paused in order to await the arrival of 3/321 for a com-

bined drive across the road. When it attempted to expand the hold on the escarpment occupied the previous afternoon and to move onto East Road, the latter battalion ran into heavy fire from pillboxes and emplacements protected by steep walls and sheer cliffs guarding the northern approaches to the Umurbrogol defense system. There the drive of 3/321 bogged down and for the remainder of 25 September that battalion made no further gains. Any hope of a two-battalion assault against Hill B, which the Japanese were evidently holding in strength, had to be abandoned. For the remainder of 25 September, the Army troops near East Road remained in place.³³

Despite the disappointing turn of events along the 321st Infantry Trail, progress appeared vastly more promising along the western coast of Peleliu. This applied primarily to developments along the West Road, where, at 0700, a strong Army combat patrol composed of infantry, tanks, and flamethrowers moved north from Garekoru village. The mission of this force was to destroy enemy installations that reconnaissance on the previous day had identified. This combat patrol advanced 1,200 yards, killing 30 Japanese and destroying four pillboxes and two large supply dumps before it reached Phase Line 0-5. The patrol arrived at its objective without sustaining any casualties.

Such weak resistance along the West Road indicated to General Rupertus that the enemy had concentrated his main strength in the central ridges of Peleliu. A swift drive to the north over

³⁰ *1st MarDiv SAR*, Anx A, p. 8.

³¹ *7th Mar R-2 Jnl*, 24Sep44.

³² *IIIAC C-2 Rpt*, 25Sep44.

³³ *81st InfDiv OpRpt*, 24Sep44.

West Road, coupled with a continuation of the RCT 321 drive to bisect the island, would result in the complete isolation of the Japanese in the central ridges while eliminating all enemy resistance in northern Peleliu. The possibilities that were now open to the division commander were greatly expanded, and General Rupertus decided that swift action was indicated. At 0945, division headquarters orally ordered the 1st Marines to take over the sector of the 5th in addition to its own. The 5th Marines was to pass through the lines held by 2/321 and attack towards the northern tip of Peleliu. Elements of the 321st Infantry Regiment engaged near East Road were to continue their attack eastward, but bypass the hard core of enemy resistance until movement up East Road became feasible. Then, in conjunction with the 5th Marines, they would launch a drive to the northern tip of the island.³⁴

For the first time since the Marines had stormed ashore on Peleliu, all initiative had passed into the hands of the attacking force. The Japanese, holed up in their caves and dugouts, could still kill and maim; they were to inflict many more casualties before the fight for the island was over; but the road to the tip of the island was now open. Marines were moving up to eliminate any resistance that the enemy might still offer. Japanese hopes of receiving reinforcements were fading as more and more of the coastline in their hands had to be relinquished. The momentum of the American drive had been restored. At long last the beginning of the end of the

costly and arduous operation was in sight.

*DRIVE TO THE NORTH*³⁵

Orders to move to the western portion of Peleliu found the 5th Marines in static positions on Eastern Peleliu, where the regimental mission had been to prevent enemy counterlandings. The 1st Battalion was deployed in the vicinity of the radio direction finding station near Ngardololok, the 2d Battalion was holding the islands north of the northeastern peninsula, while the 3d Battalion, less one company, occupied defensive positions along Purple Beach. The 1st Marines completed the relief of the 5th shortly after noon and assumed command of the 5th Marines sector at that time. In order to expedite movement of the regiment to the West Road, the battalions moved out on trucks at 1300, with 1/5 in the lead, followed by 3/5 and 2/5.³⁶

By 1600, the 5th Marines had executed the passage of the lines, and the regiment passed through Phase Line 0-4 near Garekoru. As 1/5 continued its advance up the West Road, it encountered erratic resistance from what appeared to be Japanese holdouts. The level terrain was devoid of the dense jungle growth abounding elsewhere on Peleliu and offered ideal conditions for the movement of tanks and LVT flame-throwers accompanying the advance battalion. Aside from occasional Japanese sniper and mortar fire, the advance

³⁵ Additional sources used for this section are: *81st InfDiv OpRpt*; *5th Mar URpts*; *7th Mar War Jnl*; *1/5 B-3 Jnl*; *2/5 OpRpt*; *2/11 SAR*; *4/11 WarD*, Aug-Nov44.

³⁶ *5th Mar URpts*, 26Sep44.

³⁴ *81st InfDiv OpRpt*, 25Sep44.

continued for about 500 yards without interruption to Road Junction 15, where the West and East Roads met. This vital point was defended by a small Japanese force, which had installed itself on a ridge dominating the road forks.

Around 1700, as the Marines approached this point, the enemy opened fire, which served only to delay the Marines. When the firefight ended the Japanese had lost 20 killed. The battalion continued its advance for another 100 yards and seized the Japanese radio station, whose towers the forward elements of RCT 321 had spotted on the previous day. Having secured this objective, the battalion established night defenses north of the radio station from the beach to the high ground east of the West Road (See Map 10). For the remainder of the evening and throughout the night, the forward elements at the radio station were continuously and heavily engaged with the enemy. The 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, was the recipient of direct fire from two 70mm guns firing out of caves less than 300 yards away. The Marines drew additional fire from enemy artillery and mortars located on the northern tip of Peleliu, as well as from two 37mm guns on Ngesebus Island. Small arms fire from three directions converged on the battalion.³⁷

To reduce the enemy artillery and mortar fire that was proving so troublesome to 1/5, the 11th Marines massed its batteries against suspected enemy artillery and mortar positions. Since direct observation was impossible, the regiment used a target list, firing on

areas that looked promising on the basis of a chart and photographic inspection. Whenever such fire resulted in reduced enemy activity, continuous shelling at a slow, irregular rate was employed on the target throughout the night. This counterbattery fire proved very effective and helped the exposed battalion to maintain its forward positions.³⁸

Nor was heavy mortar and artillery fire all that 1/5 had to contend with during the night of 25-26 September. The Japanese launched three counterattacks in the course of the evening against the hard-pressed Marines, but each of these attacks was repelled. At 0200, 26 September, a platoon of Company C took the initiative by launching a surprise counterattack, which resulted in the destruction of two particularly troublesome machine guns.³⁹

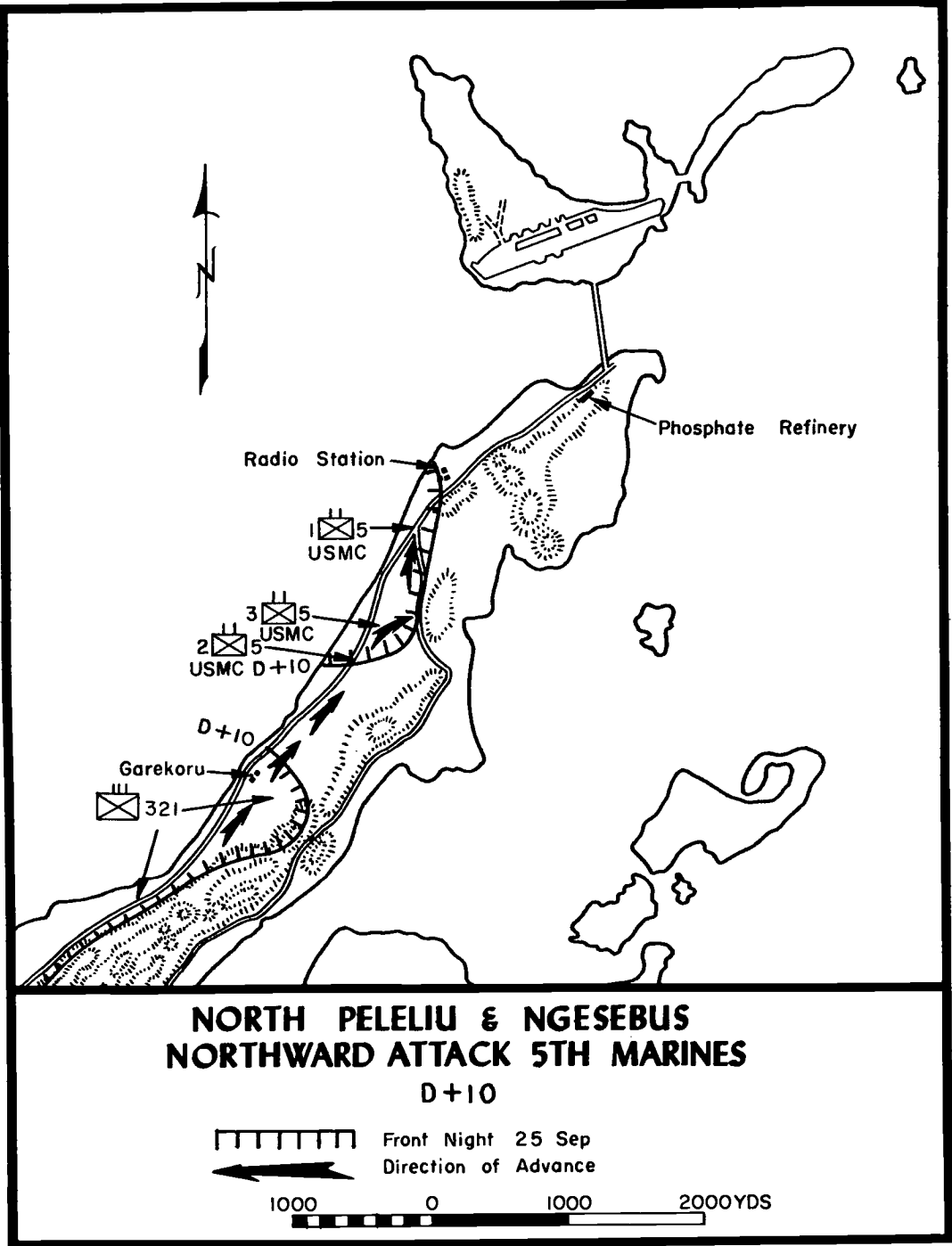
Upon reaching Road Junction 15 in the wake of the advance of 1/5, the 3d Battalion pivoted to the southeast and headed down East Road, where it established night defenses on the road and along the western slopes of Hill 80. The latter hill, in itself an isolated terrain feature, owed its importance to its location, for it was the only link separating the Kamilianul ridges to the south from the Amiangal ridges, which formed the northernmost hill mass on Peleliu.

Unlike the effective resistance that 1/5 had encountered near the radio station, the enemy that 3/5 came upon was either disorganized or unaware of the Marines' presence on the East Road. According to an eyewitness:

³⁸ Maj David R. Griffin ltr to CMC, dtd 13Mar50, in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Griffin ltr*.

³⁹ 1/5 B-3 Jnl, 25Sep44.

³⁷ Smith, *Narrative*, p. 83.



Map 10

E. L. Wilson

. . . darkness had fallen and I was engaged in tying in I Company with the adjoining Second Battalion Unit under the command of Capt. Albert J. Doherty. Captain Doherty and I were standing on the road with a small group around us discussing our situation when the word was passed from my outpost that enemy troops were approaching. We immediately took cover, not knowing how large a force it was or whether it was cognizant of our presence. The enemy was obviously unaware of the 5th Marines advance because they approached making a great deal of noise. When they reached the approximate position where Captain Doherty and I had been my men opened fire killing all of the enemy and sustaining no casualties. The enemy group consisted of about 12 Japanese Marines.⁴⁰

Once again, on the evening of the second day of continuous forward movement, General Rupertus had cause to be pleased with the progress that had been made during the day. Even though the effort of the Army troops to isolate the central Japanese defenses had been temporarily halted, this lack of progress had been more than compensated for by the rapid advance of the 5th Marines up the West Road. Except for a critical shortage of hydrogen for flamethrowers, the flow of supplies was moving smoothly.⁴¹

Behind the front lines, the engineers were keeping pace with the advance of the combat troops. By evening of 25 September, 500 men of a naval construction battalion were engaged in shore party work. Improvement of roads by the engineers was continuing. This work

helped largely to offset the complaint voiced by RCT 321 "that the presence of the 5th Marine Regiment on the west coast further complicated the traffic control problem."⁴²

Work on the airstrip was also making good progress. The Engineer Group, consisting of elements of the 1st Engineer Battalion and the 33d and 73d Naval Construction Battalions, had dug out and refilled most soft spots and graded, rolled, and watered the entire strip. Radar units and control equipment were in operation. The airstrip tower had been readied for around the clock operation.

After a night of incessant harassment by the Japanese, 1/5 spent the early hours of 26 September in consolidating its positions around the radio station and preparing for continuation of its attack later in the day to the northern tip of Peleliu. Shortly after 0600, 3/5 jumped off for an attack against Hill 80 with Company K on the left and Company I on the right. The attack carried the hill and by 0830 the assault force reached a swamp bordering the east coast of Peleliu. This advance of the 3d Battalion was of major importance because it effectively cut the island in two.

The 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, ran into stiff opposition from the Amiangal ridges dominating northern Peleliu. The northern portion of the L-shaped hill system consisted of ridges running generally from northeast to southwest for about 1,000 yards; the southern leg extended from northwest to southeast. The southern leg of the ridges was not

⁴⁰ Maj John A. Crown ltr to CMC, dtd 13 Feb50, in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Crown ltr*.

⁴¹ 1st MarDiv SAR, Anx A, p. 10.

⁴² 81st InfDiv OpRpt, 25Sep44.

continuous but broken into four separate hills or knobs, designated from northwest to southeast as Hill 1, Hill 2, Hill 3, and Radar Hill, so named because it had at one time served as an enemy radar installation. These four knobs were to gain ill repute as Hill Row. The entire Amiangel ridge system was held in strength by the Japanese, particularly the portion paralleling the route of advance of 1/5. This part contained some of the most elaborate caves and tunnels on Peleliu.

The battalion had barely started out along the West Road when the enemy in and on Hill 1 opened up on the Marines with 37mm and 75mm guns as well as automatic weapons and mortars. This curtain of fire from the Amiangel ridges was reinforced by heavy fire from Ngesebus Island. All forward movement soon halted. Attacking eastward from the West Road, Company B assaulted the second knob, Hill 2, but also encountered opposition. Through sheer determination the company was able to gain a firm foothold on the hill by early afternoon. This accomplishment in effect served to outflank the Japanese on Hill 1, but Japanese resistance on the last mentioned hill continued throughout the day. An attempt by Company C to seize all of Hill 1 during the remaining hours of daylight was unsuccessful, and continuation of the assault had to await the following day.

During the bitter fighting in which 1/5 engaged during the night of 25-26 September and for most of the following day, 2/5 remained stationary on the southern flank of the regiment. At 1600 on 26 September, when it had become apparent that 1/5 could make no further

progress, 2/5 was ordered to attack. The battalion advanced northward through the left wing of 1/5, carefully bypassing embattled Hill 1. In the course of its advance, the battalion drew heavy fire from Japanese emplacements in the plain, from the ridges on its right, as well as from Ngesebus. Enemy mortars proved especially troublesome. As a result of the heavy fire, Company F lost four of its supporting tanks before it had advanced very far beyond Hill 1.⁴³ Attempts by the artillery to give all possible support to the battalion were largely ineffectual. "We fired frequent missions throughout the day on these mortars; the reported effect was that the mortars were neutralized while we fired but that they were not destroyed. The enemy apparently withdrew into the caves during the period of our fire."⁴⁴

As evening approached, the 5th Marines occupied a jagged front line. The 1st Battalion, though out of contact with the 2d, was tied in with the 3d on the right. The mission of the 3d Battalion was to support either the 1st or 2d Battalion in the event of a major Japanese counterattack. Further progress of the 2d Battalion was impeded by a large antitank ditch, which blocked the approach to the remnants of the Peleliu phosphate plant. The Japanese had converted the reinforced concrete foundation of the otherwise demolished structure into a major defensive installation. Exposed to the enemy fire from Ngesebus Island and plunging fire from caves and defensive positions from the hills,

⁴³ 2/5 *OpRpt*, 26Sep44.

⁴⁴ 2/11 *AR*, 26Sep44.

2/5 found itself in a very unenviable situation.

Further south on the island, at the juncture of the 321st Infantry Trail and the East Road, 26 September was to bring additional gains, though not without great difficulty. On the previous day, 2/321 had seized Hill 100 and advanced to the foot of Hill B, which dominated East Road and formed the last obstacle in the path of RCT 321's advance to the east coast. The mission of capturing this vital hill had been given to 3/321, which had been scheduled to launch the attack at 0700, with 2/321 in support. Even before 3/321 could get into its attack position along East Road it drew such furious fire from small arms, mortars, and automatic weapons in the northern strongpoints of the Umurbrogol Pocket that the movement bogged down.

When it became apparent around noon that the 3d Battalion would be unable to reach Hill B, the mission of seizing the hill was assigned to 2/321. To ensure the success of the attack, it was decided to launch a two-pronged assault against the hill. During the time that the 2d Battalion was organizing for the attack, a special task force composed of 7 medium tanks, 6 LVTs, 1 LVT flamethrower, and 45 riflemen, advanced northward over the West Road to its junction with East Road. There the column pivoted to the south, followed the East Road, and by 1500 had reached a point within 150 yards north of Hill B. Such a bold maneuver could not fail to attract enemy attention, and the column suddenly found itself under frenzied attack by 15 Japanese who, vastly out-

numbered and outgunned, were promptly killed in the skirmish.

At 1600, when both attack forces had reached their jumpoff positions, the attack against Hill B commenced. White phosphorus mortar shells shrouded the hill in smoke, obscuring visibility of the defending force. The task force attacked from the north, while two companies of 2/321 attacked from the west and south. At the outset both attack forces encountered strong resistance, but in less than an hour the hill had changed hands and the entire Japanese force was wiped out. A number of Korean laborers, evidently less inspired than their taskmasters, preferred to surrender.

Despite the loss of Hill B, the Japanese took the initiative at least once during the day by attacking the command post of RCT 321 in force, after infiltrating the widely spaced Army and Marine lines. This surprise attack was launched by enemy troops armed with rifles and machine guns. The force created havoc momentarily but could not match the soldiers' fire. The Japanese then retreated, leaving 35 dead around the command post area.

Earlier that day, General Rupertus had felt that time for the capture of Ngesebus Island was ripe. "Improvement in our tactical situation led to the making of plans for an attack on Ngesebus to the north to be carried out the following day, but developments failed to warrant the pursuit of this action."⁴⁵

Instead, an additional day was set aside for preparations for the assault on

⁴⁵ 1st MarDiv WarD, Sep44.

Ngesebus as well as consolidation of the hold the 5th Marines had gained on the northern portion of Peleliu. Despite heavy resistance, elements of RCT 321 in the center of the island and the 5th Marines in the north had reached the eastern coast. The Japanese on Peleliu, though still capable of prolonged resistance, were now divided into two distinct pockets whose elimination was merely a matter of time.

Also on 26 September, "a new high in the number of prisoners for a single day was obtained when six POWs were brought in, doubling our total for the operation."⁴⁶

The night of 26-27 September was to be typical. The 11th Marines directed harassing fires against Japanese positions on the northern tip of Peleliu throughout the night.⁴⁷ The Japanese, in turn, shelled the area occupied by 3/321. Fighting also flared up in the center of the island where several Japanese were killed as they attempted to infiltrate the positions of 2/321 in the vicinity of Hill 100 and Hill B. The 7th Marines spent a generally quiet night, marked only by an exchange of hand grenades in the sector of 2/7. Weapons Company killed three Japanese during the night, one of them equipped with a machine gun. One of the Japanese dead carried the following message.

American Brave Soldiers: We think you are much pity since landing on this island. In spite of your pitiful battle, we are sorry that we can present only fire, not even good water. We soon will attack strongly your army. You had done bravely

your duty; now abandon your guns, and come in Japanese military with a white flag (or handkerchief) so we will be glad to see you and welcome you comfortably as we can well.⁴⁸

The above Japanese offer found no takers among the soldiers and Marines on Peleliu. In fact, plans for the assault on Ngesebus were already completed. Naval demolition teams were busy offshore clearing the waters between Peleliu and Ngesebus in preparation for the coming assault.

At 0800, 27 September, another milestone in the Peleliu operation was reached when, in a simple ceremony, the American flag was raised in front of the division command post. Even while this ceremony was in progress, the 5th Marines was once again embroiled in fighting of the utmost severity, in which a battalion command post was just as exposed to enemy fire as any other forward position. This applied to the CP of 2/5, which on the morning of 27 September was located in the radio station near the northern tip of Peleliu. This building was very well constructed, but had been thoroughly worked over by artillery and air bombardment.

The framework was still intact, however, and after clearing the dead Japs out, there were some rooms that were very suitable for a good CP. During the morning of the 27th several rounds of mortar fire were laid on the building with such accuracy that two of them went through the second story windows. Casualties were light but just knowing the Japs had the range on us wasn't so pleasant. Earlier that morning mortars were laid around

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ 4/11 WarD, Sep44.

⁴⁸ 7th Mar R-2 Jnl, 27Sep44, also 1st Mar Div SAR, Anx B, pp. 37-38.

the CP, with devastating effect, and caused light casualties. Major Gayle, for example, had men killed all around him but he was lucky and never got a scratch, just sand blown in his eyes, and the helmet blown full of holes. Lucky he didn't have the helmet on.⁴⁹

The 2d Battalion was to find progress extremely rough for the remainder of the day. First, the erstwhile phosphate plant, which the Japanese had turned into a blockhouse, had to be secured in an area that bristled with snipers. The problem confronting Colonel Harris was a formidable one. The blockhouse in front of 2/5 could not be taken until the antitank ditch blocking the approaches to it had been seized. This was a job that the infantry could not tackle without armored support. The regimental commander decided to utilize all arms available in reducing these obstacles. First of all, Colonel Harris called naval gunfire and artillery in on Ngesebus and any other targets suspected of harboring artillery or mortar positions.

A medium tank, equipped with a bulldozer blade, was pressed into service to level the antitank ditch, and filled it by 0830. A LVT flamethrower then was able to come within effective range of the Japanese fortification. Moments later, when the flame and smoke had cleared, all resistance from this stronghold had ceased and more than 60 dead Japanese remained in the rubble. While this action was in progress, patrols from Company E seized a small, weakly defended ridge abutting the road from the east. The 2d Battalion thereafter resumed its advance northward along

the road as well as over the adjacent ridge. Company F, at the head of the column, soon found itself embroiled in some of the most bitter and frustrating action of the entire campaign. Aside from receiving heavy Japanese artillery and mortar fire, the company faced a series of pillboxes and field fortifications on level ground, and layer upon layer of caves in the hillsides.

Even though they were not aware of it at the time, the men of the 5th Marines had come upon the most skillfully constructed defenses on Peleliu. The Japanese Army had utilized all of the many natural caves possessing tactical value, adapting them for the emplacement of heavier weapons with great ingenuity. On the other hand, Japanese naval troops had preferred to construct their own caves with the help of the *214th Naval Construction Battalion*, composed of men who had been professional miners and tunnel workers in civilian life. Since most of these Navy caves were located near the northern end of Peleliu, they proved a serious obstacle to the advance of the 5th Marines.

Sheer courage and heroism in themselves proved inadequate for the task. In the course of the morning of 27 September, Company F seized the two ridges forming the northwestern anchor of the Amiangal system and established observation posts on the crests. But this did not solve the problem of what to do about the Japanese occupying the caves about half way up the hill. Marine casualties mounted steadily, and evacuation of the wounded became more and more difficult. The assault on the ridges soon turned into a nightmare:

⁴⁹ 2/5 OpRpt, 27Sep44.

The hill we were taking was honeycombed with caves, and we used everything in the book in closing them. (Hand grenades, five gallon cans of gas, composition C wrapped around 81mm WP mortar shells, flame throwers, and finally a 155mm gun). . . . During the assault the Japs still fired out of the caves, even throwing our own grenades out at us. It was hard to believe that a 70 lb. compo charge wrapped around a 81mm mortar shell, which when set off fairly rocked the OP on top of the hill, did not kill the Nips in the caves.⁵⁰

Since the cave openings completely dominated the road leading past the northernmost ridge of Peleliu, the advance of the entire 2d Battalion ground to a halt. The first tank attempting to squeeze through the narrow gap between the hill and the northwestern shore was hit, and the Marines occupying the crest of the hill were powerless to cope with the caves underneath.

This seemingly insurmountable problem was solved late in the afternoon when the troublesome bottleneck was eliminated by means of an expedient involving a combination of arms. The solution was complicated but proved effective. First, artillery placed a continuous barrage on Ngesebus, while naval guns shelled Kongauru, an island northeast of Ngesebus and connected to the latter by a causeway. Joining the shoot were nine tanks which placed smoke shells on the closest Ngesebus beach from positions on the West Road. Every fourth artillery projectile fired against Ngesebus was a smoke shell. Five LVT(A)s, equipped with 75mm guns, then pushed out into the channel and fired point-blank into the mouth of the cave. Under this cover-

ing fire, the tanks, supported by Company G, moved up the road and beyond the cave. An LVT flamethrower was then employed against the cave. The lines of the 2d Battalion consolidated this gain and dug in for the night.⁵¹

The 1st Battalion also made important gains on 27 September. Most of the action for the day centered around Hill 1, which Companies B and C attacked at 0930. Once again the Marines were exposed to heavy fire from Japanese small arms and antitank guns emplaced in caves at the foot of the hill and on the slopes. After approaches for the supporting armor had been cleared, the rate of progress increased. In the course of the afternoon, 1/5 destroyed four 75mm and four 37mm guns, and a large number of automatic weapons. By 1700, having established a firm foothold on the hill, the Marines prepared to set up positions for the night. During the remaining hours of daylight, engineer demolition teams systematically eradicated every cave and each hollow even remotely resembling an enemy position.

In the course of 27 September, 84 Koreans and 7 Japanese were taken prisoner, a considerable increase over the previous total of 12 captured since the beginning of the operation.⁵²

According to division intelligence estimates a total of 7,975 Japanese had been killed in 12 days of bitter fighting. Casualties for the 1st Marine Division were 768 killed, 3,693 wounded, and 273 missing in action, a total of 4,734.⁵³ Similarly, casualties for RCT 321 during the first week of its commitment on

⁵¹ *5th Mar URpts*, 28Sep44.

⁵² *1st MarDiv WarD*, Sep44.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *2/5 Op Rpt*, 27Sep44.

Peleliu were 46 men killed, 226 wounded, and 7 missing, a total of 279.⁵⁴

Even though a major portion of Peleliu was now in American hands, tenacious resistance could be expected to continue from the remaining enemy pockets. Aggressive action was needed, not only for the elimination of these pockets, but also to remove from the adjacent islands those Japanese still capable of rendering effective support to their compatriots on Peleliu.

SEIZURE ON NGESEBUS⁵⁵

General Rupertus decided that Ngesebus Island was to be seized on 28 September, in a shore-to-shore operation executed with the assistance of all available supporting arms. The assault on the island was to be supported by a battleship, a cruiser, two destroyers, division and corps artillery, a tank company, a company of LVT(A)s, and a company of LVTs.

The mission of seizing Ngesebus was assigned to 3/5 about 1600, 27 September, when General Rupertus issued verbal orders to this effect to Lieutenant Colonel Lewis W. Walt, Executive Officer of the 5th Marines. Within the hour, members of 3/5 arrived at the 5th Marines command post to receive the attack order. Representatives of 1/7, held in reserve for the operation, also attended the meeting. The general plan of attack called for one hour of naval gun-

fire, air, and artillery preparation commencing at 0800. While the assault wave was covering the last 200 yards to the beach, Marine aircraft from the newly arrived VMF-114 would work the beach over. Sherman tanks were to form part of the first assault wave, flanked on either side by LVT(A)s and followed by LVTs loaded with the assault troops. The entire battalion was to embark in LVTs, and the waves were to land successively at two-minute intervals.⁵⁶

H-Hour for the operation had been set to coincide with the lowest ebb of the tide to avoid water that would be too deep for the tanks, which could not be completely waterproofed.⁵⁷

During the hours of daylight remaining on 27 September, 3/5, which had been held in reserve near Road Junction 15, relinquished its positions to 1/321 and assembled in preparation for the assault on Ngesebus. The Army battalion held a line extending from the junction in the north to Kamilianlul mountain, which was an extension of the Umurbrogol ridges north of the Wildcat Trail.

The curtain on the drama of Ngesebus opened on the morning of 28 September, when the massed fire of five artillery battalions from Peleliu, as well as heavy fire from warships and aircraft, blanketed the island. Near the northwestern shore of Peleliu, an impressive gathering of high-ranking officers had assembled to witness the operation. The group included such notables

⁵⁴ 321st RCT Unit Rpt 7, 30Sep44, Peleliu, as quoted in Smith, *Approach to the Philippines*, p. 549.

⁵⁵ Additional sources used for this section are: 5th Mar URpts; VMF-114 WarD, Sep44; 2/11 SAR; 3/5 Rec of Events; Coleman ltr; Stuart ltr; Smith, *Narrative*.

⁵⁶ LtCol Lewis W. Walt ltr to CMC, n.d., in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Walt ltr*.

⁵⁷ LtCol Arthur J. Stuart ltr to CMC, dtd 25Apr50, in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Stuart ltr*.

as Admiral Fort, and Generals Julian C. Smith, Geiger, Rupertus, Mueller, Oliver P. Smith, and Bell. The weather was cool and cloudy and interspersed with frequent rain squalls.⁵⁸

For the Corsair pilots of VMF-114, air support for the Ngesebus landings represented a very interesting and original assignment. The operation marked the beginning of combat work for the squadron, which had reached Peleliu only two days earlier. At 0630, the Corsairs hit the airstrip on Ngesebus with 500-pound bombs and strafed the entire island as well as Kongauru to the northeast. "Strafing runs were made just a few feet off the deck and a hail of lead laid all over the island."⁵⁹ At 0840, 20 Corsairs preceded the landing craft and gave the island another heavy strafing. In the course of this attack, Japanese mortar positions were spotted and one specially prominent square blockhouse with an iron door was fired on and neutralized.

Whenever aircraft were not directly over the island, the artillery on Peleliu and naval guns offshore gave Ngesebus a heavy going over, starting at 0700 and concluding at 0905. Both quick and delay fuzes were used. Observers reported that the island was completely covered with fire.⁶⁰ In the course of the preliminary bombardment, naval gunfire ships pounded the northern portion of Ngesebus and continued to fire on that part of the island throughout the landing.

The 600-yard trip from Peleliu to Ngesebus proved generally uneventful, and the landing force proceeded as

planned. Nevertheless, a few unforeseen contingencies arose that changed the sequence of events. Of the 16 tanks taking part in the operation, 3 failed to reach their destination after stalling and flooding in about three feet of water. The remaining tanks continued the crossing so cautiously that they could not keep up with the LVTs. In the end the infantry hit the beach long before the armor had completed the crossing. Another complication arose while the assault troops were en route to Ngesebus. Shortly after 0900, just as the assault waves departed Peleliu, spectators to the operation noticed that the naval gunfire had lifted and air attacks were slackening:

Upon investigation as to why the naval gunfire did not support the attack, it developed that a great deal of confusion existed as to what the location of the troops would be at H-hour. The troops had planned this attack in the manner of land warfare and to them H-hour was the time of crossing the line of departure—in this case, the shore line of Peleliu. The Navy, planning as for an amphibious assault, considered H-hour to be the time the troops hit the beach on Ngesebus. Consequently, when H-hour arrived, the fire support ships assumed the troops were hitting the Ngesebus beach and lifted their fires, when actually the troops were just moving off Peleliu.⁶¹

This temporary lapse in preparatory fire did not result in any serious disadvantage to the men of 3/5, particularly since Marine aircraft, quickly sizing up the situation, jumped into the breach and resumed the relentless strafing of the southern beaches on Ngesebus. The planes halted their assault runs

⁵⁸ *1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase II, Anx A, p. 11.

⁵⁹ VMF-114 WarD, Sep44.

⁶⁰ 2/11 AR, 28Sep44.

⁶¹ *Coleman ltr.*

only when the assault force approached within 200 yards of the island.

The first wave hit the beach at 0911. Company K landed on the left, Company I on the right, and Company L followed in the rear as 3/5 reserve. The troops moved inland quickly and secured a beachhead against light resistance. Supporting LVT(A)s made short work of several pillboxes on the beaches. Companies I and K advanced to the northwest and linked up after crossing the airfield. To expedite the operation, the battalion commander committed Company L, which pivoted to the right and attacked towards the eastern shore of the island, encountering very little opposition in the process. The assault units suffered no casualties in the landing, while 50 of the enemy were killed or captured on or near the beaches.⁶²

Within 12 minutes after the first assault wave had gone ashore on Ngesebus, the first tank lumbered across the beach. By 0930, all tanks and troop carriers except for three Shermans, had reached the island. Initial progress continued to be rapid, particularly in the zone of attack of Company L, which completed its mission of seizing the eastern part of Ngesebus within an hour and a half after going ashore. At 1300, a patrol of two tanks, three LVT(A)s, and one platoon of Company L landed on Kongauru Island off the northeastern tip of Ngesebus and secured the island against light resistance.

Companies I and K, attacking to the northwest, found the going considerably tougher in their zone of advance, particularly along the battalion left, where

a series of ridges flanked the western shore of the island. There, the Japanese were offering determined resistance from caves and dugouts. Once again it became the unenviable task of the Marines to root the enemy out of these defensive positions, a job that was accomplished with the assistance of armor. In the midst of this operation, an enemy shell landed in the center of the battalion CP, wounding the battalion commander, Major John H. Gustafson, and a number of his men.⁶³

By 1700, almost all of Ngesebus, except for a few hundred yards at the extreme northwestern tip of the island, was in American hands, though a few caves in the ridges still remained to be reduced. Because of the rapid progress made throughout the day, the presence of 1/7 was not required. The battalion reverted to division control as of 1500.⁶⁴

The otherwise deadly serious business of seizing an enemy-held island was destined to feature at least one lighter episode. This was supplied by an aide to Major General James T. Moore, Commanding General of the 2d MAW. The aide, who also doubled as pilot, flew General Moore over Ngesebus Island in an L-5 observation airplane. In the course of this reconnaissance, the pilot observed a Japanese officer, equipped with sword and white gloves, directing the emplacement of a mortar. Upon completion of the flight and discharge of his passenger, the enterprising aide obtained several hand grenades and promptly headed back for a "bombing run" on the mortar position. The grenades were dropped with unobserved

⁶² 3/5 *Rec of Events*, 28Sep44.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ 5th Mar *URpts*, 29Sep44.



ASSAULT ON NGESEBUS ISLAND *as viewed from amphibious tank in third wave.*
(USMC 97006)



MARINE ASSAULT TROOPS *advance into Ngesebus as oil dump burns in background.*
(USMC 102051)

results, but the Japanese opened up on the L-5 with a machine gun. The pilot received a bullet in the leg, which was to put him out of action for the remainder of the Peleliu campaign.⁶⁵

The 3d Battalion spent a relatively quiet night on Ngesebus. On the morning of 29 September, Companies I and K resumed the attack. Progress was normal until the two companies had nearly reached the northern tip of Ngesebus, when a 75mm gun opened up at point blank range. The Marines quickly destroyed this weapon and went on to overcome the rest of the resistance on the island. At 1500, 29 September, Ngesebus was declared secure.

An hour later, 2/321 relieved the Marines and completed mopping up. Having accomplished the mission on the island, 3/5 returned to Peleliu. The battalion had secured the island at a cost of 15 killed and 33 wounded.⁶⁶ In return, the Marines killed or captured 470 Japanese. Infantrymen of 2/321 were to account for another hundred of the enemy during the ensuing mop-up.⁶⁷

After the capture of Ngesebus it became evident that the airstrip on the island was surfaced with sand so soft that the labor required to make the field operational was out of proportion to the benefits to be derived from it. As a result, no improvements were made to the airstrip, and the main advantage gained by the capture of the island was the final elimination of the bothersome fire from Ngesebus into the flanks and rear of the Marines advancing to the northern tip of Peleliu. At the same time,

capture of the island deprived the Japanese of another possible staging area if they made another attempt to reinforce the Peleliu garrison.

*MOPPING UP THE NORTH*⁶⁸

Throughout 28 September, the spectacular operation of 3/5 against Ngesebus held the limelight. For the two battalions of the 5th Marines remaining on Peleliu, it was business as usual as the drive continued to dislodge the Japanese from their elaborate defenses on the northern tip of the island.

On the morning of 28 September, the Japanese in the northern part of Peleliu still held a pocket slightly longer than 2,000 yards on fairly level ground, except for Hill 3 and Radar Hill, and some of the tunnels in the northern leg of the Amiangal ridges, where they still resisted in strength despite the fact that the Marines were firmly established on the crests (See Map 11).

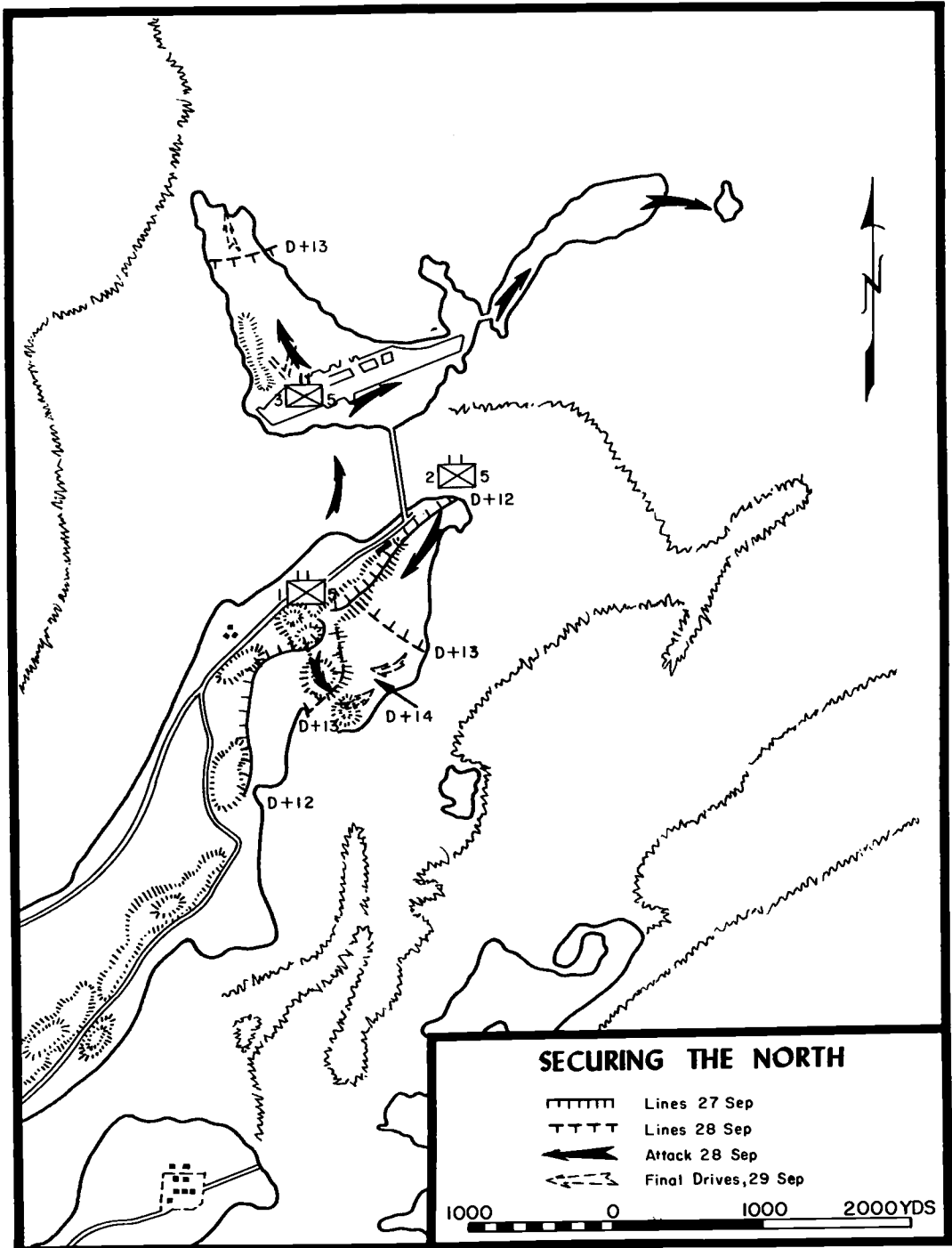
The attack of 1/5 against Hill 3 was preceded by a mortar preparation lasting over an hour. At 0845, Company C jumped off. Approaching the hill from the north and west, bazooka and demolition teams crept forward and eliminated dugouts and caves one after the other. A Sherman tank rendered valuable support by firing directly into the cave openings. In this manner the tank knocked out a particularly annoying machine gun, which had been firing on the advancing Marines from the south-eastern slope of Hill 3. Before noon, 1/5 had secured a foothold on the crest

⁶⁵ Smith, *Narrative*, p. 90.

⁶⁶ 3/5 *Rec of Events*, 29Sep44.

⁶⁷ Smith, *Approach to the Philippines*, p. 548.

⁶⁸ Additional sources used for this section are: 1st MarDiv WarD, Sep44; 1st MarDiv SAR; 5th Mar URpts; 1/5 B-3 Jnl; 2/5 OpRpt; Smith, *Narrative*.



of the hill, though the Japanese still resisted in the caves below. Shortly before 1300, the enemy attempted to counterattack but was driven off by mortar fire. For the remainder of the afternoon Company C continued to consolidate its gains on the hill, capturing 15 Koreans in the process.⁶⁹

At the very northern tip of Peleliu, 2/5 resumed its drive with the objective of seizing the flat ground to the north and east of the Amiangal ridges. Company G jumped off at 0700 and advanced through coconut groves near the eastern base of the ridges, where the Japanese had established elaborate fortifications. Despite heavy fire, the company continued its advance and by 1000 had killed 150 Japanese in the assault.⁷⁰ For the first time on Peleliu it was observed that some of the Japanese remained completely apathetic in the face of the Marine attack and did nothing either to attack the Americans or to defend themselves. Company G continued its advance southward until it was able to bring small arms fire to bear against Radar Hill, the last ridge of the Amiangal system still entirely in Japanese hands. Here the company halted the advance.

Throughout the day Companies E and F of 2/5 worked with the demolition men trying to neutralize the caves, which honeycombed the hills. When the caves became untenable, some of the Japanese decided to make a break for it. A chase ensued when a group of about 70 Japanese suddenly poured out

of the hillside and headed for the reef. Marines of Company F gave chase with three LVTs, overtook the fleeing enemy, and killed those refusing to surrender.⁷¹

Since on 28 September the Japanese retained only two small islands of resistance on Peleliu, naval air support was secured as of 1800 that date. During the night of 28-29 September, fighting flared up in the center of Peleliu. There the Japanese launched what the 1st Marine Division designated "the first in a series of desperation raids" out of the Umurbrogol pocket against the lines of the 7th Marines. The regiment suffered light casualties in repulsing these assaults which at times closed to within bayonet range.⁷² The Marines also drew mortar, machine gun, and rifle fire throughout the night.

The attack against the Japanese in the north of Peleliu reached its climax during 29 September, which also marked the end of large-scale operations in that part of the island. The 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, launched its assault against Radar Hill with flamethrowers, bazookas, and demolition charges. As anticipated, capture of the strongly defended hill could not be completed in one day. Even though the Marines reached the crest of Radar Hill on 29 September, a large cave underneath remained to be reduced.

East of the Amiangal ridges, Company G of 2/5 continued to mop up enemy remnants in this area. The company drew fire from caves in the ridges east of the phosphate plant. An ap-

⁶⁹ 1/5 B-3 Jnl, 28Sep44.

⁷⁰ 2/5 OpRpt, 28Sep44.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² 1st MarDiv WarD, 28Sep44.

proach to these ridges from the east did not appear feasible because a swamp separated the Marines from these hills. Tanks stationed in the coconut grove fired point blank with their 75mm guns at the mouth of one of the most troublesome caves, temporarily sealing it. On the western side, the Japanese had blasted from the inside and cleared openings to two caves that the Marines had sealed. As a result, the enemy was able to fire on both the east and west beaches.⁷³ Atop the ridges, Company F sealed four caves only to have the Japanese blast them open from the inside. To add to the vexation and frustration of the Marines operating near the northern tip of Peleliu, the Japanese suddenly fired into the rear of Company G from caves that had been sealed on the previous day. Company E finally assaulted these positions and chased some of the Japanese onto the reef, where riflemen on LVTs annihilated them in short order. Nevertheless, in these caves an undetermined number of Japanese remained, capable of causing additional trouble when it suited them.

For all practical purposes, organized enemy resistance on northern Peleliu, except for the grimly defended pocket in the high ground north of the airfield, came to a virtual end on 29 September.⁷⁴ The Japanese situation report for 29 September failed to indicate any great concern about events on northern Peleliu, mentioning only that "... on the front line, where our main forces are facing the enemy's main force, all

is quiet; in fact, even some of our forces there are helping us out in the battle taking place in the north area of Peleliu."⁷⁵ Twenty-four hours later, the tenor of the Japanese report changed, for in reference to northern Peleliu, Colonel Nakagawa reported that "... after a fierce battle, the enemy was finally successful in occupying the area. Our surviving forces are attempting to dash southward, cutting through the enemy in order to join the main force."⁷⁶

On the morning of 30 September, the 1st and 2d Battalions, 5th Marines, continued to mop up the northern leg of the Amiangal ridges and Radar Hill. At 1000, both battalions were ordered to withdraw to the vicinity of the radio station prior to being relieved by elements of the 321st Infantry Regiment.

This relief took place during the afternoon of 30 September. While the Marines, somber and weary after their prolonged struggle for northern Peleliu, were en route to Ngardolok for a well-deserved rest, few imagined that more than a sprinkling of Japanese had remained in the Amiangal ridges. As it turned out, those Japanese remaining on northern Peleliu dug their way out of previously sealed caves, reoccupied new positions, and in a number of instances forced the bewildered Wildcats to retake positions that the 5th Marines had previously secured.⁷⁷ At least two more days were required to end such resistance as remained in northern Peleliu, and even then isolated Japanese

⁷⁵ *Japanese CenPacOps*, p. 113.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Smith, *Approach to the Philippines*, pp. 546-547.

⁷³ 2/5 *OpRpt*, 29Sep44.

⁷⁴ 1st MarDiv WarD, 29Sep44.

continued to exist in dugouts whose entrances were partially blocked by debris.

During the struggle for northern Peleliu, the 5th Marines had killed and captured over 1,170 Japanese. Elements of RCT 321 accounted for another 175 following their relief of the Marines.⁷⁸ The campaign for Peleliu during the last half of September had resulted in

an estimated total of 9,076 enemy dead and 180 prisoners of war. During the same period of time, the 1st Marine Division had lost 843 killed, 3,845 wounded, and 356 missing, a total of 5,044 casualties.⁷⁹ Except for the Umurbrogol pocket the entire island of Peleliu was in American hands. The last phase of the bitter struggle for Peleliu was about to begin.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 548.

⁷⁹ *1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase II, Anx A, p. 13.

The Umurbrogol Pocket: 29 September-15 October¹

PROBLEM AND SOLUTION²

The imminent conclusion of operations on northern Peleliu and the island of Ngesebus once again shifted the focus of attention to the center of Peleliu, where Colonel Nakagawa still held out in his final strongpoint, the Umurbrogol ridges. In this area, nature and the Japanese appeared to have conspired to block access to any force intent on seizing the fortress. The terrain was such that it was practically impossible to make an accurate measurement of the dimensions of the pocket, though the closest estimate described it as 1,900 yards north to south on its eastern side, approximately 1,200 yards long in the west, and, on the average, 550 yards wide from east to west. (See Map 12).

A scrutiny of the terrain in which the final operations on Peleliu took place clearly indicates the difficulties inherent in assessing the size of this relatively small pocket. The ridges of the Umurbrogol system were higher, longer, and

more densely compressed than the hills occupying the northern portion of the island. Even though the highest elevation among the coral ridges was only about 300 feet, the sides of such hills were, as a rule, extremely steep and fissured. Many had razor-back summits devoid of any cover or concealment. Deep draws and gullies, the floors of which were often interspersed with coral boulders and outcroppings, were commonplace. The "chaotic jumble of steep coral ridges."³ defies accurate description, though it has been said that:

The exotic-sounding name Umurbrogol Mountain became associated with some of the most unpleasantly exotic terrain on the face of creation. . . . But words are inadequate, photographs not much better. One has to see it fully to believe it.⁴

A participant in the battle was to recall many years later:

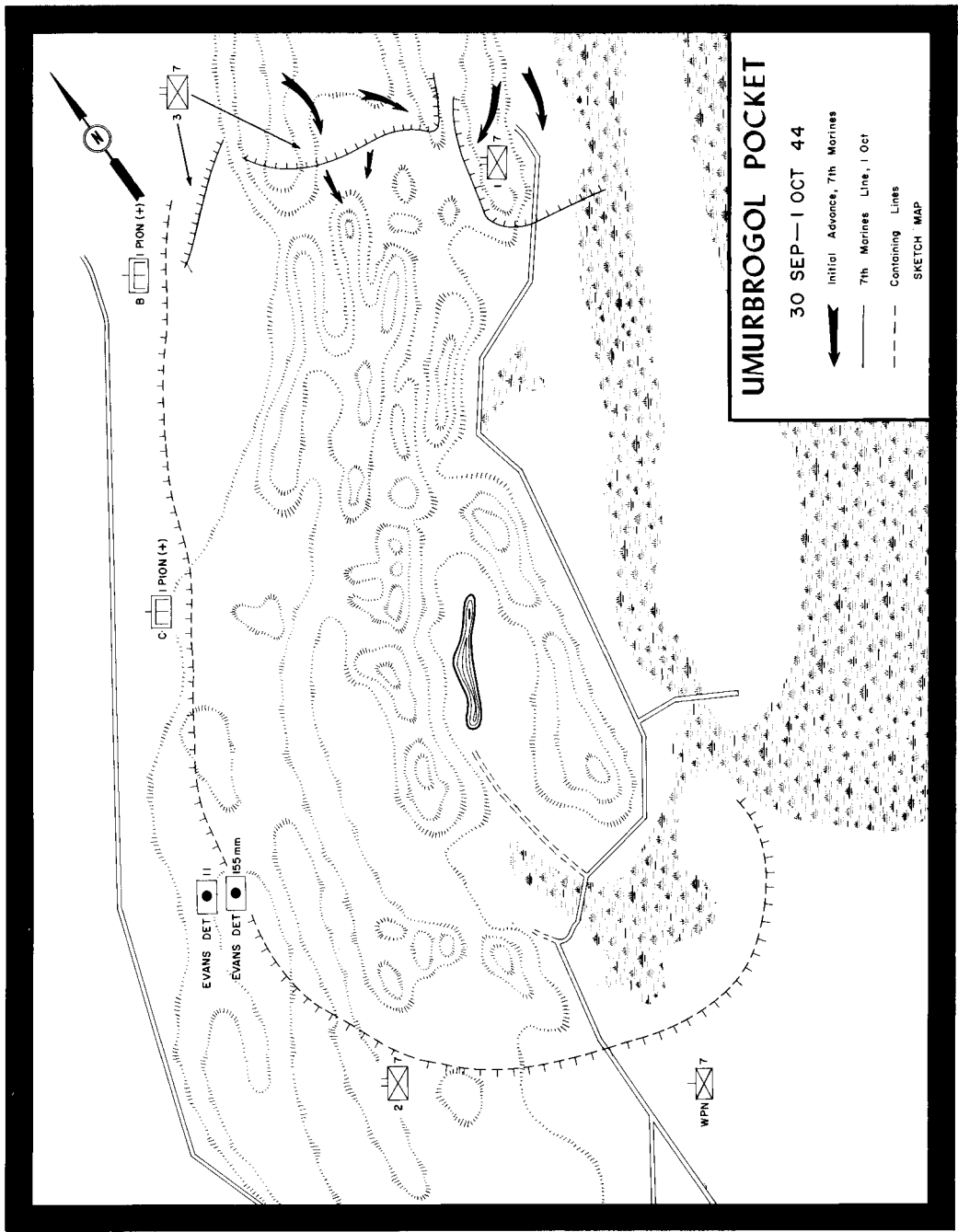
Our language just does not contain words that can adequately describe the horrible inaccessibility of the central ridge line on Peleliu. It was a nightmare's nightmare if there ever was one. Unfortunately, during the planning stage of the campaign we did not fully realize the nature of the ground so it caught us pretty much by surprise when we actually came upon it. Nothing in our planning studies and subsequent development of plans led us to realize how terrible it was. The maps

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this chapter is derived from: *IIIAC Palaus Rpt*; *1st MarDiv SAR*; *1st MarDiv WarD*, Sep-Oct 44; *81st InfDiv OpRpt*; *1st MarDiv D-2 Jnl*; *1st MarDiv D-3 Jnl*; *Peleliu Comment File*; *Japanese CenPacOps*; Smith, *Narrative*; Hough, *Assault on Peleliu*; Morison, *Leyte*; Smith, *Approach to the Philippines*; McMillan, *The Old Breed*; Historical Committee, *81st Infantry Division*.

² Additional sources used for this section include: *CTF 32 AR*; *1st MarDiv D-2 Rpts*.

³ Smith, *Approach to the Philippines*, p. 551.

⁴ Hough, *Assault on Peleliu*, p. 136.



we had were lacking badly in accurate terrain configurations, and the relatively few aerial photos we at Corps Headquarters were permitted to receive did not give us much of a clue, probably because the vegetation hid the exact nature of the ground from our photo interpreters and the rest of us. So, we were somewhat unprepared for what actually existed. I think this led both naval and ground force commanders to make overly-optimistic predictions of the effectiveness of fires and capabilities of troops. The fact that the Marines and Army troops were able to capture the Umurbrogol Pocket at all is a tribute to sheer guts, tenacity, and unmatched bravery.⁵

This, then, was the ground that the Japanese had pledged to defend to the death. Nature had done its share to aid the defending force, for the numerous hills in the pocket contained an undetermined number of caves, which the Japanese had skillfully exploited for the defense. These caves, mostly natural formations, lacked the size and sophistication of defenses on northern Peleliu, which had borne witness to the ingenuity and skill of Japanese naval engineers and miners. In contrast to the Navy, the Japanese Army had been primarily interested in adapting the terrain to defensive combat. As a result, the Army caves were constructed as covering or mutually supporting positions. Most of the Army caves were small; however, the few larger ones were ingeniously employed for the emplacement of heavy weapons. Out of the almost perpendicular coral ridges the Japanese had blasted a series of interconnecting caves, whose destruction

was to prove by far the most difficult feature of the entire operation. The caves varied in size from simple holes, large enough to accommodate two men, to large tunnels with passageways on either side which were large enough to contain artillery, 150mm mortars, and ammunition. Some of the latter caves were equipped with doors that had been camouflaged.

All of the Japanese defensive positions, carefully chosen and well camouflaged, had excellent fields of fire. For all practical purposes they were immune to naval gunfire, bombardment by artillery and mortars, or bombing and strafing. Enemy small arms fire was particularly accurate, indicating thorough training in rifle marksmanship. Marines frequently were killed or wounded by enemy fire from positions 200-400 yards away.

The most outstanding landmarks and prominent elevations within the Umurbrogol Pocket were: Walt Ridge, occupying and dominating the southeast corner of the pocket, parallel to the East Road. Boyd Ridge, north of Walt, and separated from it by a depression which was 70 yards wide; an unnamed ridge which ran between Boyd Ridge and the 321st Infantry Trail; the Horseshoe or Horseshoe Valley, also known as Five Brothers Ridge. West of the Five Brothers was another valley, known variously as Main Valley, Little Slot, and finally as Wildcat Bowl. This depression was enclosed to the west by the China Wall, to the southeast by a jagged ridge known as Five Sisters. Another narrow depression, ominously designated as Death Valley, separated the Five Sisters and China Wall from

⁵ BGen William F. Coleman ltr to HistBr, dtd 9Jun66, in *Peleliu Comment File*.

the coral ridges dominating the West Road. Except for slight variations, all of the Umurbrogol ridges extended from northeast to southwest or from north to south.

While the situation of the Japanese in the pocket was serious, it was by no means desperate. Colonel Nakagawa was able to report on 28 September that his *Peleliu Area Unit* main force was about the size of two and a half battalions.⁶ The Japanese garrison was not running short of food or ammunition, though individual prisoners occasionally reported a shortage of water. Such a lack of water was eliminated when heavy rains came to Peleliu on and after 28 September, in advance of far more severe weather that was shortly to hit the island. For the Japanese this rain was a godsend, and they trapped enough water in underground cisterns to last for months. Nor was the Umurbrogol Pocket as isolated as appeared at first hand, for unknown to the Marines, Colonel Nakagawa's command post maintained constant telephone communication over a sub-oceanic cable with General Inoue on Babelthuap. Throughout the prolonged operation on Peleliu, the existence of this cable was never suspected by the Americans.⁷

Though the Japanese in the pocket undoubtedly were aware that their annihilation was merely a matter of time, such realization did not affect an obviously high state of morale. During the last days of September, the 7th Marines attempted on several occasions to bring about the surrender of the

enemy through leaflets and broadcasts over a public address system. In each instance, no positive results were attained, and the regiment was forced to report that the effect of propaganda leaflets had been absolutely nil. As a final resort, a prisoner was dispatched into the pocket to entice his compatriots to give themselves up. This maneuver produced mixed results. The first cave visited by this emissary, who was armed only with rations and cigarettes, was occupied by Japanese Army personnel who not only refused outright to consider his request but threw a hand grenade at him. Undaunted by such a discouraging reaction, the emissary visited a second cave, occupied by nine laborers. There a more friendly reception awaited him. The laborers listened and, emerging from the cave unarmed, surrendered to the Marines.

During the period from 22-27 September, the Japanese defending the Umurbrogol ridges had escaped the full wrath of the American assault, which at that time was directed against the northern portion of Peleliu and Ngesebus. In fact, no offensive operations were launched against the pocket during this period. The Japanese, on their part, remained generally quiet in the daytime and launched sporadic sorties against the American lines only under cover of darkness. During the lull in the fighting in this sector, elements of RCT 321 remained deployed along the northern fringes of the pocket near the 321st Infantry Trail, and the 7th Marines held the ridges adjacent to the West Road between the airfield and the trail. Korean laborers surrendering at the northeastern tip of the pocket near Hill

⁶ *Japanese CenPacOps*, p. 112.

⁷ Inoue interview, dtd Mar 50, in *Worden ltr.*

B on 27 September estimated that 3,000 Japanese remained in the Umurbrogol ridges.

In spite of the large number of Japanese remaining in a compact but extremely well-defended bastion the 1st Marine Division estimated on 29 September that:

enemy resistance, except for the grimly-defined pocket in the high ground north of the airfield, came to a virtual end. . . . Despite continuing resistance, for all practical purposes, Palau Operation was completed!⁸

On the following day, CTF 32 reported that Peleliu, Angaur, Ngesebus, and Kongauru had been captured and occupied, and that base development had been initiated and could proceed without enemy interference.

All hopes to the contrary, the blood-letting that marked the battle of Peleliu was far from over. Once again, tattered and grimy Marines would have to assault cave after cave with rifles, bayonets, and flamethrowers before the finish to one of the bloodiest operations of the war could be written. Conquest of the unyielding fortress could be achieved only through relentless and aggressive force applied against the weakest part of the pocket. Once this weak spot had been uncovered, aggressive action on the part of the Marines would do the rest.

THE 7TH MARINES ON THE OFFENSIVE⁹

Nearly a week had passed since the 1st Marines battered itself against

Bloody Nose Ridge and the 7th Marines failed in the attempt to penetrate into the Umurbrogol from the southeast. As September drew to a close, the 1st Marines was preparing to leave Peleliu, handing to the 7th Marines and Army troops the task of overcoming whatever resistance remained on the island. The only gains made in the central area of Peleliu during the last week of September were in the north. There, men of the 321st Infantry Regiment had made a small advance southward from the trail bordering the pocket to the north. The Japanese still retained control of the dominating hills.

Even while operations on Ngesebus Island and in northern Peleliu were progressing in high gear, General Rupertus orally ordered 2/321 to move to Ngesebus to relieve elements of the 5th Marines on that island. On 29 September, 1/7 relieved the remainder of RCT 321 along the northern perimeter of the Umurbrogol pocket. The men of the 321st proceeded to the northern tip of Peleliu to assist the 5th Marines in subduing that portion of the island. The 7th Marines assumed responsibility for operations throughout the Umurbrogol pocket as of 29 September. The movement of troops took place while heavy rains and winds were buffeting the entire island, and roads turned into quagmires which impeded all movement. In fact, throughout 28 September and part of the following two days, the weather remained foul, and heavy rain squalls with strong westerly winds stopped unloading on the western

⁸ 1st MarDiv SAR, Phase II, Anx A, pp. 12-13.

⁹ Additional sources used for this section

are: CTF 32 AR; 7th Mar R-2 Jnl; 1/7 Hist Rpt; 2/7 URpt; 3/7 WarD, Sep-Oct44; 3/7 Rec of Events.

beaches and retarded unloading on the eastern beaches.

On 29 September, the northern perimeter of the Umurbrogol Pocket ran slightly south of the 321st Infantry Trail, which it paralleled for about 400 yards. This line, designated as Phase Line X, passed through West and East Roads and angled southeastward from the 321st Infantry Trail to skirt Boyd Ridge in the northeastern tip of the pocket. Passing through extremely broken terrain, it was not a solid front line but a series of outposts deployed on the more elevated ridges. The most prominent terrain features directly south of this line were two hills known as Wattie and Baldy Ridges, which formed the northern anchor of the Japanese pocket. To the east of Walt Ridge, the extensive swamp bordering the pocket was considered so inaccessible to friend and foe alike that the Americans committed no troops in this area. Consequently, the ring of encirclement was manned only from the north, west, and south. In order to make as many men of the infantry battalions available for the assault as could be mustered, elements of the supporting arms helped hold the containing line.

Initially, the southern perimeter of the pocket was assigned to the 7th Marines Weapons Company, which moved into positions facing the mouth of the Horseshoe across the swamp. The company left flank skirted the base of Hill 300 and the Five Sisters. Along the west side of the pocket, a variety of units consisting of Marine artillerymen, engineers and pioneers, and personnel from amphibian tractor battalions manned a containing line, which ex-

tended for about 750 yards between the western terminus of Phase Line X and Bloody Nose Ridge. At night these lines were strongly reinforced by personnel from division headquarters. Along the northwestern edge of the pocket, 2/7 occupied containing lines, which had remained substantially unchanged since 21 September, when the battalion had first moved into these positions.

General Rupertus assigned the mission of reducing the Umurbrogol Pocket to 1/7 and 3/7. Both battalions were to attack southward from Phase Line X at 0800, 30 September. On the left, 1/7 was to attack along the East Road, secure the ridges dominating the road, and maintain contact with 3/7. While these preparations were being made, a company of the 710th Tank Battalion, together with units of the 1st Marines were readying for departure from Peleliu on 29 September.

An air strike against the pocket was scheduled for 1530, 29 September, aimed at shattering the complacency of the Japanese in the Umurbrogol. Because of inclement weather and poor visibility, it first appeared that the strike would have to be called off, but then it was decided to attack as scheduled, despite the weather. In a way, the strike, the first of many, was unique because the Corsairs were able to make the run from the airfield to Bloody Nose Ridge in only 15 seconds. Frequently the planes never even bothered to raise their wheels.¹⁰ Over the pocket the aircraft released napalm bombs. Shortly thereafter, heavy explosions and a pall of smoke obscured the pocket, while

¹⁰ Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*, p. 257.

fires on the hillsides and in the depressions raged unchecked. This is how aerial warfare looked to the Marine aviators on Peleliu:

After an observation hop to ascertain the facts about this incomparable cave country Major Stout's division was briefed at the division CP and took off at 1515 with 1,000 lb. bombs. The whole show could be seen right from our ready tent and from the tower top you could see right into the draw. Smoke bombs were used on the deck for a reference circle and Stout's flight laid them in without difficulty. It was a bit ticklish, but none landed or ricocheted outside the 400 yards area or the caves. . . . Sixteen planes returning from a bombing mission against Babelthuap took a good look at the damage done by Major Stout's flight in the horseshoe next to Bloody Nose Ridge and reported it was considerable.¹¹

Regrettably, this impressive display of low-level bombing, though it must have rocked the Japanese in their caves, failed to diminish their capacity to resist. Prisoners captured later said that the only effect of the bombs was to make a big noise.¹² On the subject of air attacks, Colonel Nakagawa had only this laconic comment to make: "The enemy plan seems to be to burn down the central hills posts to ashes by dropping gasoline from airplanes."¹³

The disappointing results of this napalm strike and those that were to follow were probably due to the fact that the division concept of the proper employment of this weapon was in error. Based on incomplete reports of the Saipan operation, the 1st Marine Division felt that napalm would prove

to be an excellent area weapon, highly effective in burning out areas of heavy foliage. There was no evidence to support this theory, and when used in this fashion, napalm was not effective.¹⁴

The night of 29-30 September was marked by numerous Japanese attempts to infiltrate the positions held by the 7th Marines. At approximately 2300, small enemy raiding parties, using hand grenades as their principal weapon, attacked company and battalion command posts, causing much confusion and a number of casualties. This infiltration was aided by a heavy rain which fell throughout the night. By 0100, four of the infiltrators had been killed in the 1/7 sector and quiet returned. At 0600, a Japanese occupying a foxhole within the battalion CP, was captured.¹⁵ The 2d Battalion, in anticipation of enemy infiltration attempts during the night, had strengthened the perimeter with 85 men from the 1st Pioneer Battalion and stretcher bearers from the 16th Field Depot, but the enemy limited himself to harassing the Marine lines with mortar fire. Japanese infiltration attempts against 3/7 resulted in the death of one Marine, the wounding of three others, and the killing of four Japanese.¹⁶

That these were not haphazard or random attempts at infiltration is illustrated by a Japanese view of the raids, expressed by Colonel Nakagawa on 30 September:

We are attempting to defeat the enemy by using our close-quarter combat tactics to the utmost. Last night two close-quarter combat units from the 15th Infantry Regi-

¹¹ VMF-114 WarD, Sep44.

¹² 2/7 WarD, Sep44.

¹³ Japanese CenPacOps, p. 131.

¹⁴ 1st MarDiv SAR, Phase II, Anx L, p. 6.

¹⁵ 1/7 HistRpt, 30Sep44.

¹⁶ 3/7 WarD, Sep44.

ment, 2d Battalion, put 70 enemy personnel on the casualty list. The enemy's total loss for last night's attack was one hundred and scores of casualties, and a great deal of provisions and ammunition was captured. Besides this, enemy losses may be greater for 10 close-quarter combat parties are still hidden in enemy territory.¹⁷

Company B of 1/7 jumped off at 0800 on 30 September and in little more than two hours accomplished its assigned mission to seize a ridge just west of the East Road, at the northeastern tip of the pocket. From this vantage point, the company was to support the attack by Company A as it headed down East Road for the next ridge 100 yards to the south. The heavy rain, which already had forced cancellation of an air strike earlier that morning, also interfered with the jumpoff of Company A, whose attack did not get under way until 1245. The intervening time was used to good advantage by an engineer demolition team, which sealed all of the caves in the area seized that morning. When visibility improved, Company A attacked down the East Road, supported by three tanks and a LVT flamethrower. Following a mortar barrage against the second hill, Company A was able to continue the advance down the East Road, even though it drew machine gun fire from enemy positions further south. One of the tanks and the LVT eliminated the enemy machine guns and the forward movement continued. As a result, an advance of 300 yards to the south was achieved. Company C, previously held in reserve, was committed to occupy the newly seized territory. At

1530, the 7th Marines halted the advance and set up a defensive perimeter for the night. In addition to the ground captured, the Marines had destroyed an enemy mountain gun¹⁸ and a number of machine gun positions during the advance.

While 1/7 was pressing the attack down the East Road, 3/7 extended its line eastward in order to reduce the front of 1/7. Shortly before 1100, 3/7 received orders dividing it into two separate task organizations, one for the defense of the ridge line along the West Road and the other for support of the attack of 1/7 against the northern perimeter of the pocket. The commander of 3/7, Major Edward H. Hurst, took direct charge of a force consisting of Company L, one platoon of Company K, and part of Headquarters Company. The battalion executive officer, Major Victor H. Streit, was to employ the remainder of the battalion for the defense of the ridge line. During the afternoon, Company L aggressively patrolled forward of its lines, particularly against the hill designated as Baldy, but rain and fog made it necessary to withdraw the patrols for the night.¹⁹

In stationary positions parallel to the West Road, 2/7 occupied a ringside seat when at 0700, 30 September, VMF-114 carried out an air strike against the draws to the front of the 2d Battalion. The strike, conducted by 19 aircraft, attacked the horseshoe called "Death Valley," and dropped 20 half-ton bombs into an area only about 100 yards square. In the words of the aviators:

¹⁷ *Japanese CenPacOps*, p. 114.

¹⁸ 1/7 *HistRpt*, 30Sep44.

¹⁹ 3/7 *WarD*, Sep44.

Again we were to bomb targets less than 1,100 yards from the airplane line. The Japs attempted to confuse our men by putting up white smoke against our colored smoke lines. However, it all went off well and 14 perfect hits were scored in an area skittishly small even for dive bombing with releases as low as 500 or 600 feet. Two bombs were duds and two bursts were made in the air after ricocheting off the ridge. Plenty of margin of safety and our bomb pattern adjudged satisfactory. After half the runs had been completed we got direct information from the regimental CP as to the exact position of each hit which made the balance of the bombing that much safer and more effective. A rain squall coming in from the north almost upset the show, but finally only delayed it for 10 minutes.²⁰

Despite the accuracy of the air bombardment, the strike failed to achieve any conclusive results. Japanese resistance continued undiminished, and even before noon the 7th Marines Weapons Company reported that it was receiving rifle and machine gunfire from the area bombed earlier in the day.²¹ Bombardment from the air was followed by a mortar barrage against the Japanese, who for the remainder of the day retaliated by subjecting 2/7 to heavy sniper fire. Snipers to the rear of the battalion, presumably members of the raiding parties that had infiltrated during the previous night, also harassed the supply lines of the battalion.²²

Even though the gains made by the 7th Marines during 30 September appeared promising, there was increasing evidence that the battalions could not sustain the pace of the attack for long.

On the last day of September, for instance, the effective strength of 1/7 was only 90 men. Dysentery, as much as enemy action, was responsible for this reduction in combat strength. The men blamed the intestinal disorders on the presence of an excessive number of large flies, which allegedly had been drawn to the area by the presence of a large number of unburied Japanese dead.²³ To some extent, progress of 1st Division troops was slowed by growing combat fatigue and the shortage of personnel, the result of heavy casualties.²⁴ The combat efficiency of 3/7 also was estimated to be below 50 percent for the first time, the decrease being attributed in part to an increase in the sick rate.²⁵ The situation on Peleliu was perhaps best summed up by the division itself:

The early days of October brought with them a change in the complexion of the combat activity that had occurred during the previous month on Peleliu. The campaign had now become a battle of attrition—a slow, slugging yard by yard struggle to blast the enemy from his last remaining stronghold in the high ground to the north of the airfield. This drive constituted within itself almost a separate operation, the rugged, almost impassable terrain requiring more time to clean out than previously had been spent in clearing all the southern Palaus.²⁶

The morning of 1 October dawned inauspiciously with continuing unabated rain and high winds. Once again the 7th Marines prepared to advance into the Umurbrogol pocket from the north. The zone of action consisted of a series

²⁰ VMF-114 WarD, Sep44.

²¹ 7th Mar R-2 Jnl, 30Sep44.

²² 2/7 WarD, Sep44.

²³ 1/7 HistRpt, 30Sep44.

²⁴ 1st MarDiv SAR, Phase II, Anx A, p. 14.

²⁵ 3/7 Rec of Events, p. 14.

²⁶ 1st MarDiv WarD, Oct44.

of precipitous coral ridges concealing an undetermined number of enemy well armed, adequately supplied, and with no apparent intention of surrendering. The seizure of Baldy Ridge was an essential step towards the further exploitation of the surrounding ridges.

At 0720 the left flank of Company L, 3/7, began to advance in an attempt to straighten the lines prior to a general attack on Baldy. The company gained about 75 yards during the first hour of the advance, but at this point the Marines were halted by heavy machine gun and small arms fire. Because of the precipitous slope and the strength of the enemy position on the peak, it was considered unwise to assault Baldy Ridge from the front, and 3/7 made no further progress for the remainder of the day.²⁷

The 1st Battalion fared little better in attempting to link up with 3/7, though Company B reported visual contact at 1034. A friendly 155mm barrage against enemy positions on Baldy Ridge during the afternoon had to be lifted because shell fragments were landing in friendly lines.²⁸

Aside from the limited advance of the 7th Marines on 1 October, the main activity for the day was the reorganization and movement of units. In the course of the morning, the 710th Tank Battalion relieved the Marine 1st Tank Battalion. The latter, together with the 1st Marines and 2/11, completed loading and stood by for departure. The next day the 1st Marines sailed for

Pavuvu, the first echelon of troops to depart from Peleliu.²⁹

At 0800, 1 October, 3/5 relieved 2/7 in the containing line along the southwestern perimeter of the Umurbrogol. In driving rain Companies E and G, 2/7 moved down to the West Road, where they were loaded into DUKWs and driven to the battalion bivouac area north of the airfield. Battalion headquarters and Company F returned via the trail running down Bloody Nose Ridge. After two continuous weeks in the line, the battalion was scheduled for a brief rest and hot food.³⁰ On the same day an additional squadron of Corsair fighters, VMF-122, landed on the island. Despite heavy rain and poor overall visibility, the American troop movements did not escape Japanese detection. Shortly before 2000, two enemy float planes approached Peleliu, dropped two bombs in the vicinity of Purple Beach and departed, causing neither damage nor casualties.³¹

In order to forestall a stalemate similar to the one that had previously checked the advance of the Marines into the Umurbrogol and because of the dwindling strength of his battalions, General Rupertus decided to launch a massive attack against the pocket on 3 October. Instead of continuing the lagging advance from the difficult terrain in the north of the pocket, the division commander planned to shift his main effort to the southeast and seize the remainder of the East Road and adjacent

²⁷ 3/7 *Rec of Events*, p. 14.

²⁸ 1/7 *HistRpt*, 1Oct44.

²⁹ 1st MarDiv WarD, Oct44.

³⁰ 2/7 WarD, Oct44.

³¹ 1st MarDiv SAR, Phase II, Anx A, pp. 14-15.

ridges in the southeastern part of the pocket. Once the initial objective had been achieved, the enemy strongholds in the pocket were vulnerable to attack from the flanks.

On the basis of earlier observations, it was strongly suspected that Colonel Nakagawa maintained a highly flexible reserve which could be rushed at very short notice to any threatened point within the perimeter of the pocket. As a result, the attack of 3 October called for a coordinated series of efforts from different directions. The 2d Battalion, 7th Marines, attacking northward, was to seize Walt Ridge. Attacking southward, 3/7 had the mission of taking Boyd Ridge. Once having captured their objectives, both battalions were to shift their advance westward into the center of the pocket. To forestall a head-on collision between the two battalions, different jumpoff times were assigned. The 3d Battalion was to remain in position until 2/7 had seized the objective and could indicate its position with smoke.

While the Japanese were preoccupied with this new threat, 3/5 was to extend its front to the east and attack the Five Sisters in the southern portion of the pocket. The 5th Marines Weapons Company, supported by armor of the 710th Tank Battalion, was to move into Horseshoe Valley and up East Road in order to support the attack of 3/5. The depleted 1/7 was to relieve the regimental weapons company in the containing line during the morning of 3 October. The ranks of 3/7 were reinforced with an engineer company, a platoon of the regimental weapons company, and a de-

tachment of 52 men from the 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion. Two tanks and one LVT flamethrower were also attached to the battalion.³²

During the remainder of 2 October, the units to take part in the attack on the following morning regrouped as scheduled. The 3d Battalion, 7th Marines relieved 1/7 along the northeastern perimeter of the pocket. To make additional manpower available for the attack, detachments of artillerymen took over the line previously held by 3/7.

Before effecting the relief of 1/7, Major Hurst, commanding 3/7, conducted a physical reconnaissance of the 1st Battalion lines. The relief commenced shortly after 1500 in driving rain and was not completed until 1845.³³ Major Hurst established his command post on a ridge adjacent to East Road about 300 yards behind the lines. At the CP of 2/7, preparations for the attack were also under way. Mindful of the heavy casualties that the Japanese had inflicted on 2/1 and 1/7 on 19 and 20 September in the same area, Lieutenant Colonel Spencer S. Berger, 2/7 commander, was taking every precaution to keep history from repeating. Initially, Berger conducted an aerial reconnaissance of the area, after which he and his staff carried out a ground reconnaissance. The intelligence officer reconnoitered the swamp to the east of East Road to ascertain whether a covered route of approach could be found. He soon discovered that it was not feasible to move a battalion through the mo-

³² 3/7 *Rec of Events*, p. 14.

³³ 1/7 *HistRpt*, 2Oct44.

rass;³⁴ the approach would have to be made in single file over a narrow trail, which was fully exposed to observation and fire from the enemy in positions on the high ground. During the evening of 2 October, the battalion commander held a pre-attack conference at his command post, where he directed that all requests for mortar fire would go through a central fire direction center. For this attack a provisional rifle company was to be formed from the regimental weapons company and attached to 2/7.

Throughout the day, hostile eyes had observed unusual movements outside the pocket, and Colonel Nakagawa duly reported: "It seems that the enemy acted as if preparing for an attack on our surrounded garrison units in the central hills."³⁵ The Japanese did not have long to wait. At 0630 an intensive barrage by the 155mm guns and the massed fire of 81mm mortars of five battalions rocked the pocket, causing Colonel Nakagawa to report that "all through the night of the 2nd, the enemy fired 40,000 artillery shells from their positions on land and ships at our defense posts."³⁶ During the closing phase of the bombardment, the mortars fired smoke shells in order to screen the advance of 2/7.

Less than half an hour after it started, the preparatory fire ceased and Company G moved out in a single file across the swamp leading towards Walt Ridge. By 0730, having advanced under cover of the smoke, the first platoon had secured a foothold on the southern end of the ridge and was making good progress. Up to this point Japanese resist-

ance had been negligible, but once the Marines gained the ridge, they began to draw heavy fire not only from their front but also from the Five Brothers to the west, across the Horseshoe. Company E was ordered to advance through the right of Company G and continue the attack. Both companies became pinned down by heavy enemy fire and when casualties mounted, tanks and halftracks attached to the weapons company moved into the Horseshoe to cope with the Japanese on the Five Brothers and the western slope of Walt Ridge. At the same time, LVT flamethrowers proceeded up the East Road to neutralize Walt Ridge from the east. At 0900, the advance bogged down when the Marines drew murderous crossfire upon reaching the top of a high vertical cliff, which was separated from the adjacent hilltop by a saddle. Two out of every four men attempting to get across were hit, including the commander of Company G. At this point, the supporting tanks discovered a large cave with a concrete front at the foot of one of the Five Brothers. The cave was promptly neutralized, and its 60 Japanese occupants were killed.

While the two companies held on to their precarious hold atop the southernmost slope of Walt Ridge, Company F, bypassing the scene of the most bitter fighting, advanced northward on the East Road and prepared to assault Walt Ridge at a point north of the saddle where the advance of the two remaining companies had bogged down. The leading elements of Company F had barely begun the climb when the company was ordered to pull back from the ridge and await further orders.

³⁴ 2/7 WarD, Oct44.

³⁵ *Japanese CenPacOps*, p. 128.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

By this time, the tanks and halftracks supporting the infantry action in the Horseshoe were beginning to draw heavy mortar, artillery, and small arms fire. One halftrack was hit. Casualties mounted and it became increasingly difficult to evacuate the wounded. The tanks on the right flank along the crest reported that they were out of ammunition. The advance of the 2d Battalion had reached its limits. Having seized the southernmost crest of Walt Ridge, the 2d Battalion decided to consolidate, marking the northernmost positions with purple smoke, which signalled the 3d Battalion to begin the advance from the north.³⁷

The attack by 3/7 began at 1020, when Companies K, I, and L moved out in that order. After crossing a ravine, which was covered by enemy small arms fire, a squad of Company K advanced 100 yards by 1130 and was halfway up a ridge paralleling the East Road. The rear half of the lead platoon was unable to get across the ravine because the enemy had stepped up his rate of fire. The remainder of the platoon detoured around the swamp to the east of the road and approached the ridge from that direction. By 1500, the entire company had gained the crest of Boyd Ridge. Accordingly, the battalion commander decided to send Company I through the swamp to effect a juncture with Company F of 2/7 and to build up a solid line on the left of Company K. Within the hour Company I established contact with Company F, but had to break it in order to stay tied in with Company K. In the end, Company I had to refuse its

left flank, retaining only visual contact with Company F but remaining tied in with Company K on Boyd Ridge.

Following the successful capture of Boyd Ridge on 3 October by elements of the 3d Battalion, 2/7 continued its advance over the crest of Walt Ridge. At 1350 Company E moved through the right flank of Company G over a newly blasted trail, which the engineers had completed, while Company F advanced northward over the East Road. In mid-afternoon, Company F received the cheering news that elements of 3/7 were only 75 yards to their front. Shortly after 1600, the company tied in with 3/7 on the right and Company E of 2/7 to the left. At this point, elements of 1/7 relieved the exhausted men of Company G on top of Walt Ridge, and the company went into battalion reserve. Evening of 3 October found Companies B, E, and F on the crest of Walt Ridge, with Company F echeloned down the slope, where it tied in with the left of 3/7. Shortly before 1900, the attack was halted for the night. The provisional rifle company to the left of 2/7 was relieved by 1/7, which withdrew from positions forward of the causeway to the line previously held by the weapons company.³⁸

In an action entirely separate from the operation taking place along the eastern perimeter of the Umurbrogol pocket, 3/5 attacked during the morning of 3 October from the south towards the Five Sisters with the objective of distracting the attention of the Japanese from the activities of the 7th Marines. Companies I and L ascended four out of the Five Sisters, while Company K,

³⁷ 2/7 WarD, p. 18.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

supported by a tank, moved into Death Valley. There the difficult terrain, combined with increasing enemy resistance, prevented any further advance. In the course of the afternoon, 3/5 drew such heavy small arms fire from undetermined sources that the battalion withdrew and set up a line of defense about 100 yards from where it had jumped off in the morning.³⁹

The multiple attacks of 3 October had resulted in the capture of Boyd and Walt Ridges as well as the opening of the East Road. Even then the road could not be considered safe for traffic as at least two sections of it remained under enemy fire. The 2d Battalion made these gains at a cost of 24 killed and 60 wounded against approximately 130 Japanese killed.⁴⁰ The 3d Battalion lost 4 killed and 25 wounded against 22 enemy dead.⁴¹

On 3 October the Japanese were not the only enemy that the Marines had to contend with, for the weather had also taken a turn for the worse. The onset of unfavorable weather was particularly detrimental to Marine aviation on Peleliu, as VMF-114 reported:

No flights today of any kind. Two divisions stood by in the ready tent which nearly blew away in a 45 knot wind. Half of our maps were torn to shreds and the skipper came around with a dozen men to stake down the tent, before it was completely ruined. Huge breakers were pounding the beaches. Two LSTs tied up to what was once our pier on Orange Beach were pounding the coral and most of the shipping had been retired to Kossol Passage to ride out the storm. Most units

ashore were put on two meals a day to stretch the food a little further. The water situation was not critical, but gasoline, bombs, and food were running short as nothing was being unloaded anywhere on the beaches.⁴²

The discomfiture, which the inclement weather imposed on the Marines, promised to be a great boon for the Japanese on Babelthuap. Never slow to exploit an advantage, General Inoue and his staff felt that the time was ripe for another attempt to reinforce the Peleliu garrison.

We prepared to move the three battalions remaining at Babelthuap and the one battalion at Koror, together with group headquarters, to Peleliu around 2-3 October. We learned through a report that a typhoon was headed in the direction of Palau and planned to move during the storm which we knew would neutralize the American carrier-based planes. However, the typhoon did not approach the Palaus, and we did not have an adequate number of barges, so we cancelled this plan.⁴³

Not all of the 1st Marine Division casualties occurred at the perimeter of the pocket. Death also stalked the quiet sectors of Peleliu. A case in point was the West Road, which represented the more vital artery between northern and southern Peleliu. For several days prior to 3 October, a stretch of the road known as Dead Man's Curve had come under intermittent sniper fire from the ridges dominating the road from the east. The snipers had filtered out of the pocket

³⁹ VMF-114 WarD, Oct44.

⁴⁰ Interrogation of Col Tokechi Tada, IJA, by 2d Lt James J. Wickel, AUS, 24May47, attachment to ltr, MajGen Paul J. Mueller, USA, to Director of Marine Corps History, dtd 9Aug50, in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Tada Interrogation*.

³⁹ 3/5 *Rec of Events*, 30Oct44.

⁴⁰ 2/7 *WarD*, Oct44.

⁴¹ 3/7 *Rec of Events*, p. 15.

into the caves along the jungle-covered bluffs adjoining the road in the vicinity of Wattie Ridge. The 1st Division Military Police Company, responsible for traffic control on the West Road, was so depleted that it was unable to eliminate this menace.

During the afternoon of 3 October, Colonel Joseph F. Hankins, who occupied the dual position of Provost Marshal and commander of Headquarters Battalion, decided to take a personal look at the situation. Armed with an M-1 rifle, the colonel drove up the West Road in his jeep. Eye witnesses have testified as to what happened next:

Colonel Hankins appeared at the curve in the road where the Military Police were regulating the one-way traffic. An LVT had become immobilized across the road directly in the open and two or three trucks were jammed up in the near proximity of this LVT. The men, under the heavy fire of small arms from the nearby cliff had deserted their vehicles and taken refuge on the reverse slope of the road. Colonel Hankins proceeded to the middle of the road in order to restore traffic to normal condition and had actually gotten the crews back on the vehicles when he was struck by a sniper's bullet and killed instantly.⁴⁴

Colonel Hankins was the highest ranking Marine casualty sustained on Peleliu. Upon learning of the death of his provost marshal, General Rupertus pulled a company of 2/5 out of division reserve and ordered it into the high ground dominating Dead Man's Curve to eliminate the troublesome snipers once and for all. The company advanced for about 75 yards, supported by elements

of the 11th Marines, and eliminated the snipers temporarily. It later became necessary to station three medium tanks at the curve with orders to fire in the general direction of the cliffs whenever sniper fire recurred.⁴⁵

Colonel Nakagawa appeared generally unimpressed by the converging attacks of 3 October. He acknowledged receiving the heavy artillery preparation against the pocket but claimed that his garrison unit, by accurate firing and close quarter combat, had inflicted sufficient losses upon the Marines to force their withdrawal.⁴⁶

On the morning of 4 October, strong winds and high seas continued unabated and nearly reached typhoon proportions.⁴⁷ Two LSTs, tied up at the Seabee-built causeway off Beach Orange 3, were driven ashore and no other craft was able to reach the beach from the supply ships. For American personnel on Peleliu, "the rains had a glooming effect. The lightless sky turned the whole island gray. Dust-coated dungarees turned stiff, hard and unpliable when they dried out, and when they were wet they were very heavy."⁴⁸

Owing to the unfavorable weather and the extreme exertion of the previous day, the 7th Marines limited operations on 4 October to consolidating and expanding its positions. For the first time the East Road was open for supply and evacuation, though the Japanese still interfered with traffic from positions in the Horseshoe, in the draw between Walt and Boyd Ridges, and in a very

⁴⁵ Smith, *Narrative*, p. 96.

⁴⁶ *Japanese CenPacOps*, p. 129.

⁴⁷ 1st MarDiv WarD, Oct44.

⁴⁸ McMillan, *The Old Breed*, p. 335.

⁴⁴ Maj George J. DeBell ltr to CMC, n.d., in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *DeBell ltr*.

narrow draw between Boyd Ridge and the adjacent ridge to the north.

Company I, supported by Company F of 2/7, mopped up in the draw separating Walt and Boyd Ridges, using tank support to good advantage. This movement resulted in a physical linkup of the 2d and 3d Battalions. The three knobs and a ridge to the right front still separated Company K atop Boyd Ridge from Baldy. The seizure of the three knobs and the adjacent ridge would permit an attack against enemy positions on Baldy from the rear.

Up to this point, the operations of 3/7 had followed a normal course. Yet a tragedy similar to the one that had befallen Captain Pope's men on 19 September was about to strike the 7th Marines. Once again all the necessary ingredients were present: fanatical Japanese silently lurking in caves, awaiting their opportunity to strike; eager Marines, determined to advance and wrest yet another ridge from the grasp of the defenders. The first act of the drama opened routinely enough, when at 1430 Company L prepared to seize the three knobs, a mission that was accomplished in less than an hour with unaccustomed ease. Instead of halting the attack for the day, Major Hurst, sensing a weak spot in the Japanese defenses, decided to press the advantage by seizing also Hill 120, which represented an ideal jumpoff position for an attack against Baldy Ridge from the flank and rear. A company of engineers relieved Company L on the three knobs. The latter company prepared to resume the assault.

At 1530 the company began the advance up the long axis of the ridge,

paralleling the lines of Company K on Boyd Ridge barely 100 yards across the draw. Once again progress was uneventful. Shortly after 1600 the lead element, one platoon, reached the top of Hill 120, where it discovered and eliminated several Japanese positions.⁴⁹ Just when it appeared that capture of Hill 120 had been accomplished, the platoon on the ridge began to draw fire from Baldy Ridge and suffered several casualties. The men sought cover on the eastern slope of the crest, only to run into a hail of automatic weapons fire from enemy positions on the lower slopes of Boyd Ridge. As men were hit and fell, it became apparent that the platoon was caught in a merciless cross fire from which there was no cover or concealment. Neither was there any route of retreat, for Japanese along the lower reaches of Hill 120 and the three knobs contributed to the massacre. Enemy cannon and mortars joined in the cacophony of death.

For the men trapped on the ridge, the only way out was down the face of the cliffs and out through the draw, but even then they would have to run the gauntlet of enemy fire. One of the first to be killed was the senior noncommissioned officer, a gunnery sergeant. Other Marines quickly shared his fate as Japanese bullets found their mark. In a matter of minutes, dead and wounded dotted the ridge and only a few men remained unhurt. The ferocity of the enemy fire did not spare the three corpsmen that had accompanied the platoon, for only one left the ridge alive. While searching for a way out, the pla-

⁴⁹ 3/7 WarD, Oct44.

toon leader was hit and fell to his death in the gorge below.

Without any visible means of escape, the trapped men reacted instinctively. Unable to see their well-camouflaged assailants, the Marines fought back as best they could. Their predicament had not gone unnoticed. From the adjacent draw, Captain James V. Shanley, commanding Company L, known by the nickname "Jamo," was desperately seeking a means of rescuing his men. He ordered a tank up the narrow valley, but the terrain precluded the effective employment of armor. The tank eventually became a precarious shelter behind which some of the wounded could find cover. It could not take an effective part in the fighting and was helpless to stem the slaughter. From the crest of Boyd Ridge, men from Company K watched in silent rage the carnage taking place before their eyes. In desperation they began to hurl white phosphorus grenades into the gorge. Dense smoke mercifully began to obscure the scene of death and violence.

On the crest, the few men still able to maneuver did what they could to get the wounded off the ridge. There was no easy way out, and despite the smoke, Japanese bullets were still finding their marks. This is the picture that presented itself to an observer of the action:

The wounded crawled behind rocks or just lay motionless, bullets hitting them again and again. Others cried pitifully for help and begged their comrades not to leave them there. Medical corpsmen worked bravely and efficiently, each of them dragging men to the ledge. One of them stood up to cry: "Take it easy! Bandage each other. Get out a few at a time..." He was shot and killed. Those men who could move threw away their weapons because

they couldn't climb down the cliff speedily without using both hands. And as they climbed down, some were hit and fell to the ravine floor. Others slipped and fell, suffering severe cuts from the jagged and sharp coral... One of the wounded who lay on the floor of the ravine tried to help another across the open draw to the safety of the tank. The lesser wounded put his arms around the other and the two hobbled across the open draw. They could not make it. They dropped helpless there in the open draw, and the Japanese opened fire on them.

This was more than Shanley could stand. Although a lieutenant tried to hold him, Jamo ran out from under cover into the draw, swept one of the men into his arms, carried him back to the tank, laid him down tenderly and ran out into the fire-swept open ground again for the other. He did not reach him. A mortar shell fell before Captain Shanley got there. Shrapnel tore through Shanley, wounding him mortally. When he saw Shanley fall, a second lieutenant, Shanley's exec, rushed out. He had just reached Jamo when the chug-chug of an antitank gun was heard. He fell at Jamo's side, dead.⁵⁰

Only a few of the men made it across the draw. By 1820 it was all over. There were 11 men left out of the 48 that had ascended the ridge, and of these, only five from the leading platoon of Company L emerged from the draw unscathed.⁵¹ Colonel Nakagawa's comment on the day's happenings was short and to the point:

The enemy's plan seemed to be to attack Kansokuyama (main post of the south-eastern part) with flame throwers as well as Suifuzan Hill (main post of the northern part). Our garrison unit by accurate firing and close quarter combat inflicted

⁵⁰ TSgt Jeremiah A. O'Leary, Jr., as quoted in McMillan, *The Old Breed*, pp. 329-331.

⁵¹ 3/7 WarD, Oct44

losses upon the enemy who then withdrew.⁵²

The disaster that had befallen Company L was to have further consequences, for it resulted in the evacuation of the summits of the three knobs and the withdrawal of Company I. At the end of 4 October, Companies I and L, 7th Marines, were down from an authorized strength of 470 Marines for the two units combined to a total of 80. The 1st Battalion could barely muster more than 100 men fit for duty; and the 2d Battalion reported in at 30 percent efficiency.⁵³ Clearly, the 7th Marines, owing to the heavy losses it had sustained, was no longer able to function as an effective combat unit on the regimental level. General Rupertus therefore ordered the 5th Marines to relieve the 7th on 5 October.⁵⁴

Since D-Day, the 1st Marine Division had sustained a total of 1,027 Marines killed, 4,304 wounded, and 249 missing, a total of 5,580. The division estimated that it had killed slightly more than 10,000 of the enemy and had captured 214 Japanese and Koreans.⁵⁵ Both opponents were paying a premium price for possession of the uninspiring Umurbrogol ridges. The next chapter in the contest would be written with the blood of the 5th Marines.

THE 5TH MARINES IN THE FINAL ATTEMPT⁵⁶

The relief of the 7th Marines by the 5th Marines took place during 5 and

6 October. As a result, there was relatively little action on Peleliu during this period. The 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, received orders at noon, 5 October, that it was to proceed aboard trucks to the bivouac area of 1/5 at Purple Beach. The battalion completed the move by 1530, and 1/5 took over the positions of 1/7 at the eastern perimeter of the Umurbrogol pocket.⁵⁷

Throughout the remainder of 5 October, 2/7 engaged in continuous combat as the battalion prepared to eliminate additional caves along the East Road. Tanks supporting the infantry in this effort blasted caves on the East Road and in the draws, killing an estimated 50 Japanese in one cave alone. At 1655 the commander of 1/5, Lieutenant Colonel Robert W. Boyd, arrived at the 2/7 CP to make arrangements for the relief of the battalion and to look over the positions. The relief of 2/7 was effected on the morning of 6 October. The move did not proceed peacefully. Company F, en route to the West Road where trucks awaited the men, came under heavy fire from the draws on both flanks. Tanks had to be moved up to cover the men as they crossed the draws. While coming down the ridge, Company E drew enemy mortar fire and had several casualties. Once it had reached safety, the 2d Battalion proceeded to a rest area north of the Peleliu airfield.⁵⁸

Relief of 3/7 by 2/5 was accomplished without incident at 0800, and the weary

⁵² *Japanese CenPacOps*, p. 129.

⁵³ Smith, *Approach to the Philippines*, p. 556.

⁵⁴ 1st MarDiv FO 5/44, dtd 5Oct44.

⁵⁵ 1st MarDiv SAR, Phase II, Anx A, p. 16.

⁵⁶ Additional sources used for this section

are: IIIAC C-2 Periodic Rpts; 1st MarDiv D-2 Rpts; 2/5 OpRpts; 3/5 Rec of Events; 1/7 HistRpt; 2/7 WarD, Sep-Oct44; 3/7 WarD, Oct44; 4/11 SAR.

⁵⁷ 1/7 HistRpt, 5Oct44.

⁵⁸ 2/7 WarD, Oct44.

men of 3/7 moved into bivouac about 2,000 yards northeast of the airfield.⁵⁹ On the following day the battalion received orders from the regimental commander to provide garrison forces for the islands covering the northeast water approaches to Peleliu.⁶⁰

For the 7th Marines, all heavy combat activity on Peleliu had come to an end. To the 5th Marines, responsibility for the final drive into the Umurbrogol was the continuation of heavy combat, which the regiment had by this time been involved in for more than three weeks. The severe losses, the unfavorable climate, and the primitive conditions that governed the Peleliu fighting had sapped their strength. As noted by a member of the 5th Marines regimental headquarters staff during most of the Peleliu operation, the regiment:

... had been the last outfit to leave New Britain. Many were veterans of Guadalcanal. The division had optimistically said that the 5th would be one of the first outfits to leave Peleliu, and yet after securing the northern end of the island everyone knew that we would be committed again. Now once again the 1st and 7th Regiment were for the most part gone or leaving and the 5th was back at it again. The men and the officers were superb during this last phase but very, very tired.⁶¹

This weariness was not confined to the Marines on Peleliu, for there is some evidence that the enemy was not entirely happy with conditions on the island. One Japanese sergeant recalled:

Though we had much jungle training, we did not have the training to cope with the rocky terrain of this island. In addition, we were not used to the climatic conditions...⁶²

Colonel Harold D. Harris, Commander, 5th Marines, decided to use a different approach in the conquest of the Umurbrogol ridges. All previous attempts to penetrate the pocket had encompassed an attack from the north, northeast, east, and southeast. Even though both the 7th Marines and RCT 321 had sought an approach from the vicinity of the 321st Infantry Trail, the objective in each instance had been possession and control of the East Road. The idea behind the new drive from the north and northwest was to nibble away at the Japanese positions in a slow but deliberate and inexorable advance, which in due time would achieve the desired result at a minimum cost in personnel and materiel.

Once the relief of the 7th Marines had been completed, 1/5 occupied a line parallel to the East Road. This line was approximately 1,200 yards long and included both Walt and Boyd Ridges. The 2d Battalion was deployed along the northern perimeter of the Umurbrogol pocket facing Baldy Ridge. Along the southern perimeter, 3/5 had reverted to regimental control and occupied a bivouac area south of the pocket between sorties against the Five Sisters. Along the western perimeter of the pocket, parallel to the West Road, supporting troops continued to man the containing

⁵⁹ 3/9 WarD, Oct44.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Maj Donald A. Peppard ltr to CMC, dtd 13Nov49, in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Peppard ltr.*

⁶² SgtMaj Masao Kurihara, IJA, written statement, n.d., attached to ltr, MajGen Paul J. Mueller, USA, to Director of Marine Corps History, dtd 9Aug50, in *Peleliu Comment File*.

line. Many of these men were volunteers that had come forward to lend a hand to their embattled comrades by bringing up supplies and serving as stretcher bearers. Others were noncombatant souvenir hunters who were turning out in such numbers as to become a major nuisance. The situation was quickly brought under control when the souvenir-hunters found themselves abruptly shanghaied into the lines by orders from higher authority.⁶³

The first offensive action by the 5th Marines occurred within a half hour following the relief of the 7th Marines on the morning of 6 October. Company E of 2/5 attacked the northeastern perimeter of the pocket in substantially the same area where only two days previously Company L of 3/7 had met such a severe reverse. This time conditions favored the attacking force. The weather had cleared and the island was beginning to dry up after the prolonged drenching. The direction of the push was into the area west of the East Road, but unlike the abortive attempt of the 7th Marines, the efforts of the 5th were based on a firmer foundation and the rear of Company E was secure. The company advanced to the three knobs and seized two of them. (See Map 13.) Once again the Japanese let loose with everything they had. Even though any further advance was impossible in the face of such concentrated fire, the Marines managed to maintain their foothold on the two knobs, while bulldozers carved out an access road for gun and flame tanks once the drive to the south got under way. What amounted to a

sheer cliff was thus demolished to facilitate a subsequent attack against a ridge which formed the western spur of Baldy.⁶⁴

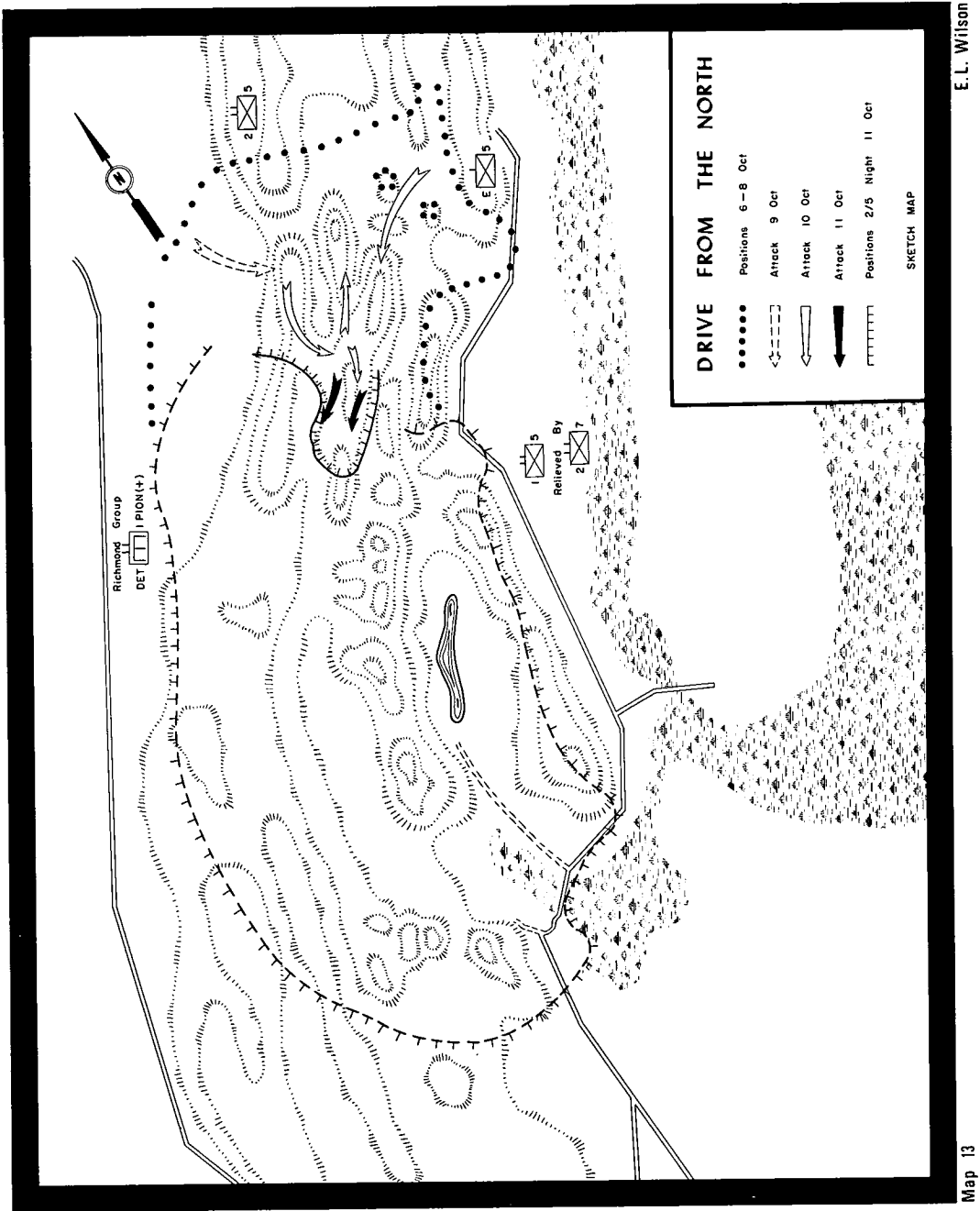
The tactical importance of this spur was twofold. First, as long as it remained in enemy hands the Japanese possessed a clear field of fire to the West Road. Second, at the center the spur connected with Baldy Ridge and thus constituted a direct route to this objective. As a result, capture of this spur was essential as an initial step towards the seizure of Baldy. The task of securing the spur fell to a platoon of Company G, 2/5 commanded by 2d Lieutenant Robert T. Wattie.

On the morning of 9 October Company G launched a frontal assault on Baldy. Lieutenant Wattie's platoon seized the spur which henceforth bore his name and became known as Wattie Ridge.

Lieutenant Wattie led his men southward along the crest of the spur for about 100 yards but drew such heavy fire that the position became untenable. At dusk the platoon was forced to withdraw from Baldy but retained possession of the two knobs that had been seized earlier in the day. The approach of night did not herald the end of the fighting for 2/5. Friendly mortar fire rocked the Japanese positions and covered the entire area from the three knobs to the top of Baldy. The Japanese retaliated by infiltrating. Hand grenades exploded all night long, but the morning of 7 October found the men of

⁶³ McMillan, *The Old Breed*, p. 337.

⁶⁴ Col Harold D. Harris interview with LtCol Gordon D. Gayle, Head, HistDiv, HQMC, 28-31Oct49, hereafter *Harris interview*.



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Map 13

2/5 still in possession of the ground seized the preceding day.⁶⁵

There is evidence that the plan of Colonel Harris to have the 5th Marines move slowly and deliberately did not meet with approval at division headquarters, where the desire for a quick conquest of the island was still paramount.⁶⁶ It was not unnatural for the regimental commander to attempt to resist such pressure, of which, in his own words, there was plenty. On the division level the attitude prevailed that:

...troops frequently have a feeling that a constant and unreasonable pressure to hurry things up is being applied from above. Sometimes, if a pressure is not exerted a battle (especially an extremely bitter one) may be allowed to deteriorate into a stalemate simply because of the peculiarities of mass inertia...⁶⁷

Any idea that the Japanese contained in the Umurbrogol were the disorganized remnants of the island garrison was dispelled by captured orders which were interpreted to show that, as late as 1 October, the enemy still was well organized and determined to take full advantage of his almost inaccessible positions. To the Japanese, the Marines appeared to be "exhausted" and "fighting less aggressively."⁶⁸ The Japanese retained a series of OPs, a mobile reserve of company strength, and close-combat units specializing in night infiltration and combat. These units had been organized specifically to destroy American tanks, LVTs, mortar positions, and other important targets. In

addition, each unit within the pocket was charged with gathering and evaluating information, maintaining its own security, and carrying out liaison with higher, adjacent, and lower echelons. Japanese artillery and automatic weapons had standing orders to impede traffic on both the West and East Roads.⁶⁹ On 6 October, the 1st Marine Division estimated enemy strength at 300-600.⁷⁰

Throughout 7 October, 3/5 kept the Japanese occupied in the southeastern perimeter of the pocket. Following a heavy preparation by mortars and 105-mm guns, Company I, supported by six tanks of the 710th Tank Battalion, advanced northward and entered the Horseshoe. Both infantry and tanks raked suspected enemy positions with fire, especially those along the lower slopes of Walt Ridge on the right and Five Brothers to the left. The Marines of 1/5 on the crest of Walt Ridge gave fire support to the advance. In the course of the day, a fire team of Marines was assigned to protect each tank. The armor was also supported by two LVT flamethrowers and a platoon of the 1st Engineer Battalion. The total advance of Company I for the day amounted to 200 yards. It represented the furthest inroad into the Umurbrogol pocket from this direction. The attack had successfully reduced Japanese cave positions that had thwarted earlier advances, though their seizure was only temporary. When the tanks ran short of ammunition later in the day and had to withdraw, the infantry also had to pull back. An attempt by Company I to bypass the

⁶⁵ 2/5 *OpRpt*, 6Oct44.

⁶⁶ *Harris interview*.

⁶⁷ *Wachtler ltr*.

⁶⁸ *IIIAC C-2 Periodic Rpt* No. 22, 6Oct44.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*.

⁷⁰ *1st MarDiv D-2 Periodic Rpt*, 5-6Oct44.

Horseshoe and penetrate into the valley separating the Five Brothers from the China Wall, in the very heart of the pocket, drew such fierce resistance that the attack never really got off the ground.⁷¹ Towards the end of the day, the battalion returned to its bivouac area north of the airfield.

In the 2/5 sector, the nibbling process continued. Patrols from Company E descended from the knobs and fired bazooka shells at the most prominent Japanese caves, while a 60mm mortar on the ridge north of Boyd Ridge registered on the terrain that the company would soon traverse. Two LVT flame-throwers and three tanks were attached to the battalion. Their effective employment in large measure would depend on the completion of a trail to higher ground where the armor could blast the Japanese positions within the pocket once the attack of 2/5 got under way.⁷²

Another two days were to pass before Colonel Harris dispatched the 2d Battalion against the menacing crest of Baldy Ridge. During 8 October, pressure against the pocket was maintained by artillery fire from the north and south. Improvement in the weather enabled Marine aviation on Peleliu to participate once more in the devastation of the Umurbrogol Pocket. A shortage of aviation gasoline still prevailed because the severe storm had curtailed all logistical support. Rough seas and heavy surf precluded the use of landing craft. As a temporary expedient, gasoline in drums was floated over the reef and guided to the shore by swimmers.⁷³

Peleliu-based aircraft stepped up their attacks on 8 October. Twenty aircraft of VMF-114 participated in the first strike, which began at 0700. Each Corsair carried a 1,000 pound bomb. The mission was repeated at 1300, and once again the sound of exploding bombs reverberated throughout Peleliu. The pilots of VMF-114 did not limit themselves to inflicting death and destruction on the Japanese; they also dropped leaflets to the cave-dwelling Japanese officers with the following message:

Officers of the Japanese forces:

As you can see if you look at the planes, the material and the ships, your best efforts are not impeding our work. American planes not only bomb you at will, but they also bomb Babelthup and the other islands north of here. Perhaps you can see the flames. Your comrades to the north have all they can do to help themselves, so how could they help you?

You honor and respect your men, but how can they honor and respect you if you make them die needlessly? Thousands of brave Japanese soldiers before you have realized the futility of death in such circumstances; they will live to raise families and help build a new Japan.

You still have this choice—raise a white flag and come out unarmed. We will give you water, food, shelter, and medicine for your wounded.⁷⁴

Even though Colonel Harris expressed satisfaction with the results of the two air strikes, the effect remained difficult to estimate “because with each aerial attack the Japs only burrowed deeper into their vast caves.”⁷⁵ Just as before, the effectiveness of leaflets remained substantially nil. The Japanese did not entertain any thought of surrendering.

⁷¹ 3/5 *Rec of Events*, 7Oct44.

⁷² 2/5 *OpRpt*, 7Oct44.

⁷³ VMF-114 WarD, Oct44.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ 1st *MarDiv SAR*, Phase II, Anx A, p. 16.

A sign discovered in a Japanese dugout carried the message: "Defense to the death. We will build a barrier across the Pacific with our bodies."⁷⁶

Along the northern perimeter of the pocket, the preparations for the capture of Baldy Ridge neared completion. Just off the West Road along the northwestern edge of the pocket, heavy weapons were emplaced near the command post of 2/5 to support the battalion attack. Major Gordon D. Gayle, commanding officer of 2/5, directed the fire of a battery of 105s against positions in and around Baldy Ridge and the hills to the south. The heavy shells, fired pointblank into the ridges, pulverized the coral until the very shape of the hills underwent considerable change.

Still worried about the possibility of Japanese counterlandings from Babelthuap, General Rupertus ordered a reinforced company of RCT 321 to seize the island of Garakayo, situated about 7,000 yards north-northeast of Peleliu. The soldiers, reinforced by 10 LVT (A)s from the 3d Armored Amphibian Battalion, were to land and annihilate or capture all enemy forces on Garakayo Island, and destroy enemy defenses.⁷⁷ After having seized and occupied the island, the soldiers were to establish an outpost. In addition to denying the use of Garakayo to the Japanese, the garrison was to prevent the movement of enemy forces from the north to

reinforce Peleliu and Ngesebus and, at the same time, prevent the enemy from escaping northward from the two islands.

The Army troops landed on Garakayo as scheduled early on 9 October. There was little opposition. By late afternoon the soldiers had patrolled the entire coastline of the island and had reached some of the hills in the interior. The troops encountered numerous caves, observation posts, and machine gun emplacements showing signs of recent occupation but found them unmanned.⁷⁸ A total of five Japanese were found on the island and killed.

On Peleliu, the 5th Marines continued to probe the perimeter of the Umurbrogol pocket. There, elements of 2/5 succeeded in seizing a ridge west of Baldy and in knocking out a number of caves. Even though the Marines had to abandon some hard won ground, their artillery did seal some of the caves that had forced the withdrawal. Each Japanese position eliminated in this manner would reduce Marine casualties when the final capture of Baldy Ridge was attempted on the following day. The bulldozer that had started work on a trail into the Umurbrogol two days earlier continued to work until it had gone within the time allotted as far as it could—midway down the ravine between Boyd Ridge and Ridge 3, a semi-detached razorback south and slightly east of Baldy Ridge. In preparation for the attack scheduled on the following morning, VMF-114 carried out an additional air strike against the Japanese pocket.⁷⁹ The planes dropped twelve

⁷⁶ Gen Alexander A. Vandegrift and Robert B. Asprey, *Once A Marine: The Memoirs of General A. Vandegrift, United States Marine Corps* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. 1964), p. 274, hereafter Vandegrift and Asprey, *Once A Marine*, used with permission.

⁷⁷ 1st MarDiv FO 8-44, dtd 10Oct44.

⁷⁸ 1st MarDiv D-2 Periodic Rpt, 9-10Oct44.



MARINES OCCUPY RIDGE *in the Umurbrogol shrouded by smoke from aerial bombing and artillery fire. (USMC 95258)*



MARINE TANK-INFANTRY TEAM *advancing into the Peleliu ridges during final phase of the operation. (USMC 97433)*

1,000-pound bombs on target but failed to observe definite results.

The attack of 2/5 against Baldy Ridge jumped off on the morning of 10 October, preceded by an artillery barrage, which began at dawn and continued until shortly before 1100. At this time Company G jumped off with the mission of securing the southern spur of Baldy Ridge and advancing as far north as possible over the ridge. After a sharp skirmish with the Japanese defenders, the Marines carried the crest and swept northward until they had secured the entire ridge. Company E, jumping off shortly after noon, seized Ridge 120 southwest of the three knobs. This time the devastating fire that had cut Captain Shanley's company to ribbons was no longer in evidence, and the Marines were able to consolidate their gains. The importance of the terrain that had been seized was further underscored at approximately 1600, when 50 enemy troops came through the lines of Company G and surrendered.⁸⁰ Because Companies E and G were tied in only by fire during the coming night, heavy artillery and mortar fire was maintained throughout the night to cover the gap and discourage any enemy counterattack. A platoon from Company F joined Company G as reserve. The interdiction artillery fire in some instances was laid as close as 25 yards to Marine lines to keep the enemy from moving in and throwing hand grenades. No counterattack materialized.

In the course of 10 October a minor mystery was solved. For several days artillery shells from an unknown source

had been landing on the southern tip of Peleliu. These had been reported as enemy shells whose place of origin was the subject of considerable speculation. The solution to the vexing problem turned out to be easier than anticipated: it was definitely established that the shells were our own, that they came from positions on the northern end of Peleliu, and that they had been directed into the Umurbrogol pocket. Apparently, some of the shells had ricocheted off the hills and continued on to the southern part of the island.⁸¹

The morning of 11 October saw the continuation of the slow, dogged advance that had marked the progress of the previous day. With nearly all of Baldy Ridge and Hill 120 in American hands, the way was open for an attack on Hill 140, which dominated the terrain between Baldy Ridge to the northeast and the Five Brothers to the south. In addition to representing the deepest inroad yet made into the heart of the Umurbrogol pocket, possession of Hill 140 would provide the Marines with a base they could use to fire directly not only on the northernmost of the Five Brothers, but also into the Horseshoe, and down the draw separating Walt and Boyd Ridges.

Preparatory to launching the attack on Hill 140, Company G seized the remainder of Baldy Ridge, though a few strongpoints still remained in enemy hands on the slopes. The advance continued until the Marines came up against a ravine separating Baldy Ridge from Hill 140. Along a parallel line to the east, Company E attacked along the

⁷⁹ 2/5 *OpRpt*, 9Oct44.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ 1st *MarDiv D-2 PerRpt*, 9-10Oct44.

eastern slope of Ridge 3 until it encountered heavy small arms fire from enemy holdouts on the slopes of Baldy Ridge and the northern slope of Hill 140. Company G moved downhill, neutralizing one cave after another and thereby easing the situation of Company E, which was still exposed to heavy fire from Hill 140 to the southwest. At this point Colonel Harris committed Company F, which passed through the lines of Company E and attacked towards Hill 140 through a ravine separating Ridge 3 and the objective. The men bypassed the strongly defended northern slope of Hill 140 and attacked the formidable elevation from the west. The attackers made rapid headway, and by 1500 Company F had occupied the objective.

During the remainder of 11 October the Marines of 2/5 consolidated their newly won positions and eliminated many Japanese caves on the hillsides. In the words of the official report: "The enemy was very thick throughout our newly occupied areas, and the mopping up was a bloody procedure, 60 of the enemy killed in a very short time."⁸²

The evening of 11 October found 2/5 in full control of the newly seized ground. Company E occupied Ridge 3, Company F remained on top of Hill 140, and Company G was firmly entrenched on Baldy. The drive of the 2d Battalion into the very heart of the Umurbrogol pocket not only achieved its objective but did so at a minimum cost in lives. In fact, the capture of Hill 140, one of the key bastions of the entire Japanese defense system, was attained at the cost

of 2 killed and 10 wounded. In commenting on the day's activities, Colonel Nakagawa did not mention the loss of his vital bastion in the northern part of his pocket; instead, he limited himself to the statement that "... all through the day there were heavy engagements with the enemy and our armies standing face to face. . . ."⁸³ Colonel Nakagawa was forced to admit in his report for the following day that the American drive had made progress. In keeping with the Japanese tendency of reporting only the brighter side of things, he added that "... the enemy penetrated our front lines but were repelled by night attack. . . ."⁸⁴

To be sure, there was a Japanese counterattack against Hill 140 during the following night, combined with Japanese attempts to infiltrate the American positions. Nevertheless, conditions on Peleliu had undergone a radical change since the men of the 1st Marine Division had first attempted to enter the Umurbrogol. The situation had reversed itself and the Marines were in possession of the dominating heights, at least in the northern perimeter of the pocket. As a result, the Japanese counterattack made no headway, and at no time did it threaten the hold of the 5th Marines on the newly captured heights.

Important changes in the American command structure occurred on Peleliu on 12 October. Indirectly these resulted from the passing of control of operations in the Palaus scheduled for the next day, from the U. S. Third Fleet and Admiral Halsey to the Headquarters, Forward

⁸² 2/5 *OpRpt*, 11Oct44.

⁸³ *Japanese CenPacOps*, p. 141.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

Area Central Pacific (Task Force 57) under Admiral Hoover, scheduled for 13 October.⁸⁵ At 0800, 12 October, General Geiger moved his command post ashore on Peleliu and declared the assault and occupation phases of operations on the island ended.⁸⁶ "Its termination was to mark the passage of command from the task force afloat to an area commander. It did not signify that active combat had ceased. The battle on Peleliu was far from being over."⁸⁷ In accordance with this order RCT 321 and Garrison Force, consisting of the 16th Field Depot and other supporting units, passed under IIIAC control. RCT 321 assumed responsibility for the eastern arm of Peleliu, and the Island Garrison Force became responsible for the area south of the Umurbrogol pocket.

The capture of Hill 140 during the afternoon of 11 October and the penetration into the Umurbrogol pocket from the north was to mark the last offensive operation of 2/5 on Peleliu. In the course of the morning of 12 October, the weary Marines were relieved by 3/5. It became evident that the Japanese were becoming alert to the foothold that the Americans had gained in the Umurbrogol. The relief of 2/5 took place under heavy sniper fire. Before the movement was completed, 22 Marines had become casualties. The commanding officer of Company K, in attempting to familiarize himself with the company sector, was instantly killed by a Japanese sniper. The enemy exploited the confusion re-

sulting from a relief of line units by infiltrating positions from which he had been driven the previous day. Company I drew heavy rifle and machine gun fire when it prepared to relieve Company F in the ridges above West Road (See Map 14).

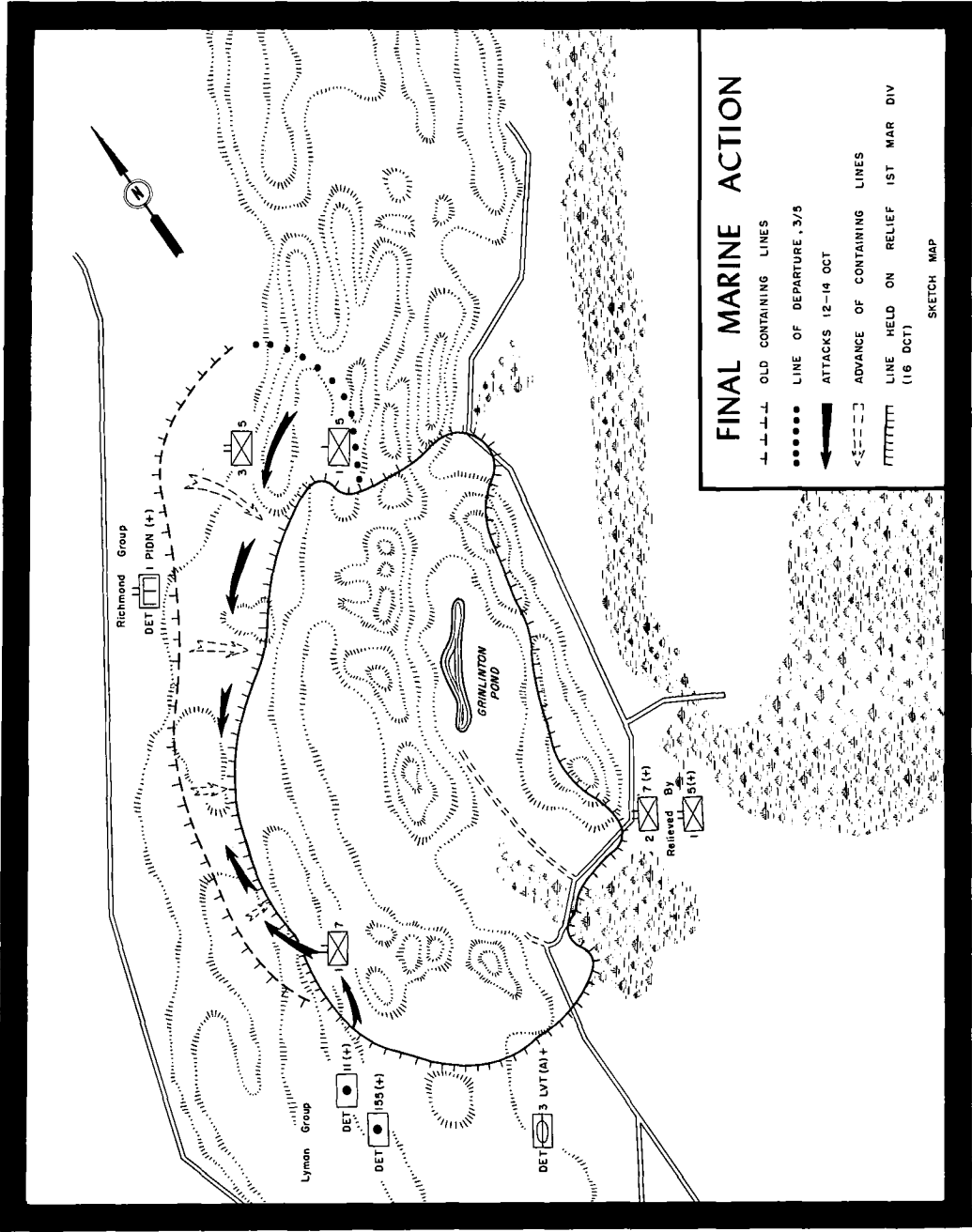
Lest it appear that the initiative on 12 October rested entirely with the Japanese, one incident occurred that showed the Marines were equally adept in taking advantage of a situation and making improvisations when needed. Even prior to the capture of Hill 140, the Marines had speculated about the feasibility of getting a field piece up on this hill or on Wattie Ridge and using it to fire point-blank at Japanese positions on the Five Brothers, in the Horse-shoe, and on the western base of Walt Ridge, where the Japanese caves had hitherto been immune to direct artillery fire. This immunity was to come to an end on 12 October. Getting a 75mm howitzer to the top of Hill 140 proved a laborious and time consuming process involving disassembly of the weapon, manhandling it up the hill to the forward position, and then reassembling it behind a protective layer of sandbags, all of which also had to be manhandled to the summit of the ridge. A participant in this action has described the operation as follows:

The tube of the howitzer was, of course, the most difficult part to manhandle and at one spot I had a rope run through it and held it around a small tree paying it out as the men moved it along. Without this precaution, had either of the men carrying it been hit it would have fallen into the deep round hole that separated the southern end of Wattie's Ridge from Hill 140.

⁸⁵ IIIAC OpO 13-44, 13Oct44.

⁸⁶ IIIAC OPlan 12-44, dtd 10Oct44.

⁸⁷ Historical Committee, *81st Infantry Division*, p. 156.



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Map 14

After we had gained the summit of the hill we reassembled the piece and layed it on the entrance of a cave at the foot of Walt Ridge. However, we found it impossible to dig in the trail, so some rocks were piled around it and we fired our first shot. It took effect on the entrance to the cave but the piece recoiled so badly that one man was injured and a good deal of work had to be done before it could be fired again. When it became apparent that the piece could not be kept in place I communicated with LtCol Louis Reinberg, C.O. of the 4th Battalion, 11th Marines and requested him to send up sandbags the next morning. . . .⁸⁸

Altogether, emplacement of the howitzer required seven hours. Once the difficulties in emplacing the piece had been overcome, the howitzer fired 11 rounds into the cave with good effect.⁸⁹

A second howitzer went into position along the southeastern perimeter of the pocket near Walt Ridge, from where it was able to fire directly at the Five Sisters and the China Wall. The latter target offered interesting possibilities, since it was strongly suspected that Colonel Nakagawa's central hills command post was located there. Once the second howitzer had gone into position, the time had come to put the theory to the test. In the words of an eye witness and participant in the action:

I spotted with binoculars and our first rounds routed out a covey of Nips around the top. Major Hank Adams reported to me later that about a dozen had been seen jumping and sliding off the east side of this hill to escape the shelling. One man was wounded after the howitzer fired about 40 rounds and it was deemed expe-

dient to secure because of the danger of further casualties from close range sniper fire and because of the approaching darkness. The next morning Friday, October 13, I suffered two killed at daybreak at the banyan tree, both shot through the head by snipers across the canyon (75 yds). Consequently the howitzer was not reemplaced. This reaction further convinced me that we had picked on an important OP. This same point had been noticed earlier from a 155mm gun position near Buckley's old CP area. Nip officers in white gloves were observed several times through a captured high-power AA telescope, apparently examining the situation through binoculars.⁹⁰

The artillery action on 12 October was to have an entirely unexpected effect on the final operations in the Umurbrogol. Intended originally only as a means of protecting the howitzers against small arms fire, the lowly sandbag soon evolved into an important tool of the infantry. The lack of cover and impossibility of digging-in had repeatedly forced the Marines to relinquish hard-won gains. Widespread use of the sandbag in protecting successive positions became a solution to the problem, though not the easiest one, since the interior of Peleliu contained no sand, and heavy sandbags had to be man-handled to the ridges in a cumbersome and laborious operation. During the final phase of operations on Peleliu the sandbag fulfilled a function as useful as that of any other offensive weapon, and in addition, provided the exposed infantrymen with a small sense of security.

⁸⁸ Maj George E. Bowdoin ltr to CMC dtd 9Feb50, in *Peleliu Comment File*.

⁸⁹ 4/11 WarD, Oct44.

⁹⁰ Col Edson L. Lyman ltr to CMC, n.d., in *Peleliu Comment File*.

On the morning of 13 October, 3/5 was the only unit of the regiment in the line with an offensive mission. The battalion was unruffled after a night of Japanese attempts to infiltrate and retake Hill 140. The Marines repulsed the enemy assault with little difficulty and the Japanese were forced to withdraw, leaving 15 dead behind them.⁹¹ At 0915 another napalm air strike was directed against the Umurbrogol pocket. Although air and ground coordination functioned perfectly, no direct observation of the results of the bombing was possible. Following the bombing, Company K dispatched a patrol into the terrain just west of the containing line near the West Road in an effort to straighten the salient formed by Hill 140 and further constrict the pocket from a new direction which had not previously been explored because of the jagged and inaccessible terrain. Under a protective screen of artillery and mortar fire, the patrol advanced for 75 yards without meeting any resistance. Similarly, a patrol from Company I penetrated into the hills to a depth of 150 yards without encountering any Japanese. The absence of opposition in this previously unexplored area resulted in the preparation of plans for an attack into the pocket on the following day.

Puzzling as it was, the lack of Japanese opposition on 13 October did not signify that the Japanese on Peleliu no longer had the resources to put up a serious fight or impede any further advance by the Marines. To the con-

trary, on the evening of 13 October, Colonel Nakagawa reported his total strength as 1,150 military, including naval personnel. Nor were the Japanese bothered by a lack of arms, for they still possessed an arsenal of 13 machine guns, 500 rifles with 20,000 rounds of ammunition, 12 grenade dischargers with 150 rounds, 1 20mm automatic gun with 50 rounds, 1 antitank gun with 350 rounds, 1 70mm infantry howitzer with 120 rounds, 1,300 hand grenades, and 40 antitank mines.⁹² Clearly, the elimination of the final pockets of Japanese resistance promised to be difficult.

At the same time, there were increasing indications that the days of the 1st Marine Division on Peleliu were numbered. Proof of this was a corps order placing the 321st Infantry again under control of the 1st Marine Division in order that comparatively fresh troops might relieve the 5th Marines, which was now quite exhausted, of the task of reducing the enemy pocket on Peleliu. The 5th Marines were to pass to corps control.⁹³ A division order called for the relief of the 5th Marines effective 0800, 15 October, by RCT 321. Effective 16 October, by which time two battalions of RCT 321 were expected to be in the line, control of all troops in the zone of action of the 5th Marines was to pass to RCT 321, whose mission was to continue the attack in the Umurbrogol pocket.⁹⁴

The last full day of combat for the 5th Marines in the Umurbrogol pocket began with an air strike against the

⁹² *Japanese CenPacOps*, p. 142.

⁹³ IIIAC OpO 13-44, dtd 13Oct44.

⁹⁴ 1st MarDiv FO 9-44, dtd 13Oct44.

⁹¹ *1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase II, Anx A, p. 18.

Five Sisters. Following a heavy mortar preparation, Company I jumped off and attacked the western portion of the pocket, which had been undefended the day before. This time the Japanese were on the alert and subjected the Marines to heavy small arms fire, which slowed but did not halt the methodical advance. By late afternoon, after a gain of about 250 yards, the company had reached a point abreast of the northernmost two of the Five Brothers and roughly 150-200 yards west of the China Wall. Here, the Marines established a perimeter defense for the night.⁹⁵

While Company I, 3/5, was advancing towards the south, Company C of 1/7 launched an attack from the southern containing line after having been attached to the 5th Marines. The company, supported by LVT flame-throwers, advanced west of the Five Sisters along an axis parallel to that portion of the containing line now manned by the 11th Marines. After a gain of approximately 125 yards, the advance came to a halt. As a result of the action on the part of 3/5 and 1/7, the containing line along the western perimeter of the pocket from north to south was shortened by about 400 yards. The Umurbrogol Pocket now had been reduced to an area approximately 400 yards by 500 yards.⁹⁶ Except for several small skirmishes with the Japanese elsewhere on Peleliu, the action on 14 October ended the participation of the 1st Marine Division in offensive operations on the island, though the final chapter in the conquest of Umurbrogol still remained to be written.

⁹⁵ 3/5 *Rec of Events*, 14Oct44.

⁹⁶ 1st *MarDiv D-2 Per Rpts*, 14-15Oct44.

RELIEF OF THE 1ST MARINE DIVISION⁹⁷

The relief of units of the 1st Marine Division by elements of the 81st Infantry Division got under way on the morning of 15 October, when 2/321 took over the lines of 3/5 along the northern perimeter of the Umurbrogol Pocket. The maneuver of effecting the relief had already been set in motion on the previous day, however, when 2/5 relieved 2/321 on Ngesebus, Kongauru, and Garakayo Islands. The Army battalion, in turn, moved to an assembly area near the 321st Infantry Trail until it could carry out the relief of 3/5. In the course of 14 October, 1/323 had reached Peleliu from Ulithi. Upon arrival at Peleliu, the battalion was placed under the control of Colonel Dark, commanding officer of RCT 321. The mission of this battalion was to relieve the Marine units manning the containing line along the southwestern perimeter of the pocket. As the relief continued on 15 October, one month to the day since the Marines had first stormed ashore on Peleliu, 3/321 relieved 1/5 at the eastern perimeter on Walt and Boyd Ridges.

Until such time as preparations for the departure from Peleliu could be completed, the 5th Marines took up the defense of the northern portions of Peleliu, Ngesebus, and adjacent islands to the north. The 1st Battalion took up positions along the extreme northern portion of Peleliu; the 2d Battalion occupied Ngesebus, Kongauru, and Gara-

⁹⁷ Additional sources used for this section are: 1st *MarDiv SAR*; 81st *InfDiv OpRpt*; 1/7 B-2 & B-3 *Jnl*, 15Sep/17Oct44, hereafter 1/7 B-2/3 *Jnl*; 3/7 *WarD*, Oct44.

kayo; and the 3d Battalion deployed along the East Road, facing eastward toward the sea.

In the course of this major reshuffling of troops within a relatively confined area, it appeared at first glance as if at least one Marine unit had been forgotten. At noon on 16 October, when responsibility for operations against the Umurbrogol Pocket was transferred officially to Colonel Dark, 1/7 was still very much engaged in the northward drive on which it had embarked two days previously. During its last day of action in the Umurbrogol, the 1st Battalion sustained an additional seven casualties before being relieved by elements of 1/323 on the morning of 17 October.⁹⁸ Following its relief, 1/7 proceeded to Purple Beach preparatory to its embarkation in the transport *Sea Sturgeon*, which left Peleliu on 22 October and arrived at Pavuvu a week later.

The 2d Battalion, 7th Marines continued its mission of patrolling the islands northeast of Peleliu during the middle of October, and did not begin loading until the 26th. The defensive mission proved generally uneventful, and as a result, the men of the 2d Battalion enjoyed a well deserved rest.

Less fortunate than the other units of the 7th Marines was the 3d Battalion, which became involved in a hard and costly action on Peleliu. The operation began at 1840, 17 October, when General Rupertus committed Company I just south of the pocket in the area of Company E, 1st Medical Battalion, where a number of Japanese had infil-

trated and reoccupied caves, from where they engaged in some very bothersome sniping. Company I arrived on the scene and entered into a brief firefight to dislodge him before nightfall. For the remainder of the night the company remained in the area to protect the service troops.⁹⁹

At 0630, 18 October, Company L relieved Company I, which had gone into combat on such short notice the previous evening that it was not fully supplied with ammunition. Shortly after 1100 Company L reported that the enemy was infesting the area in considerably greater strength than had been anticipated and had holed up in 12 cave positions. In response to this information a tank was dispatched to support the attack of the infantry. Shortly before 1400, the tank struck a land mine or some other buried explosive and blew up, killing not only several members of the crew but also the Company L commander, who had been engaged in directing the tank fire on the enemy caves. During the remainder of the afternoon 37mm antitank guns were brought up to knock out the enemy positions, but some of the Japanese still resisted at nightfall. Company L was relieved by Army units on the morning of 19 October and reverted to regimental control.¹⁰⁰

Even though RCT 321 had assumed responsibility for the continuation of the drive against the Umurbrogol Pocket as of 16 October, the 1st Marine Division retained overall responsibility for operations on Peleliu until the com-

⁹⁸ 1/7 B-2 Jnl, 16-17Oct44.

⁹⁹ 3/7 WarD, Oct44.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

mander of the 81st Infantry Division arrived on 20 October and took over. At 0800 on that date the responsibility for the ground defense of the southern Palaus and continuation of operations to destroy the remaining enemy forces on Peleliu passed from III Amphibious Corps to the 81st Infantry Division.¹⁰¹ At 0830 General Geiger and his staff departed by air to Guadalcanal. General Rupertus, together with certain sections of division headquarters, departed Peleliu by plane at 2300.¹⁰²

The 1st and 3d Battalions, 7th Marines, completed embarking on board the S. S. *Sea Sturgeon* on 21 October, left Peleliu the next day, and arrived at Pavuvu eight days later. The men of the 2d Battalion and 4/11 faced a somewhat more complicated situation in making their departure from Peleliu. They began loading on a Dutch merchantman on 26 October, but bad weather and other factors delayed the departure of the ship until "by dint of the Marines manning the winches and booms, we were able to load and depart on the 30th of October. We arrived home in Pavuvu 7 November."¹⁰³

The departure of the 7th Marines left the 5th Marines and reinforcing elements as the last remaining Marine units on Peleliu. When General Mueller assumed command of operations on Peleliu on 20 October, the Marine regiment was organized as a task force under Brigadier General Oliver P.

Smith, Assistant Division Commander, 1st Marine Division. For the remainder of its stay on Peleliu, the 5th Marines was attached operationally to the 81st Infantry Division, pending availability of transports to return the troops to the Solomons.

The 5th Marines did not see any additional fighting on Peleliu, but remained in its defensive positions until 26 October. The regimental command post was located in the ruins of the former radio station near the northern tip of Peleliu. Embarkation was delayed by the lack of suitable shipping, there were no attack transports available, and most of the freighters doing duty as resupply ships lacked accommodations for the men. Further, none of the ships had booms and winches strong enough to hoist some of the heavy equipment. Eventually the transport *Sea Runner* was able to take most of the 5th Marines on board, though a detail of 13 men with 15 vehicles of the 1st Motor Transport Battalion remained on Peleliu until 13 November. Detachments from the 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion and the 3d Armored Amphibian Battalion also remained on Peleliu until then.¹⁰⁴

For the men of the 1st Marine Division, a campaign had ended, which in the words of General Rupertus, was fought "in terrain which . . . was the worst I have even seen."¹⁰⁵ General Vandegrift described the campaign as "one of the hardest jobs that they have

¹⁰¹ IIIAC OPln 14-44, dtd 18Oct44.

¹⁰² 1st MarDiv SAR, Phase II, Anx A, p. 20.

¹⁰³ Berger ltr.

¹⁰⁴ 1st MarDiv SAR, Phase II, Anx A, p. 21.

¹⁰⁵ MajGen William H. Rupertus ltr to LtGen A. Vandegrift, dtd 18Oct44, in Vandegrift Letters.

handed them (the First Marine Division)."¹⁰⁶

According to figures up to 20 October 1944 the 1st Marine Division, in wresting the heavily fortified and defended island from the Japanese, had sustained

¹⁰⁶ CMC ltr to MajGen William H. Rupertus, n.d., quoted in Vandegrift and Asprey, *Once A Marine*, p. 274.

a total of 6,265 casualties. A total of 1,124 Marines were killed in action and dead from wounds, 5,024 were wounded in action, and 117 were missing. In the course of a sustained operation that lasted for over a month, the Marines had accounted for an estimated 10,695 enemy dead and 301 prisoners of war.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ *1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase II, Anx A, p. 21.

To The Bitter End¹

Major General Mueller, commanding general of the 81st Infantry Division, took charge of the continuation of operations on Peleliu on 20 October. On this date, in addition to elements of the 1st Marine Division still on Peleliu, General Mueller commanded RCT 321, 1/323, which had recently arrived from Ulithi, the 710th Tank Battalion, and elements of the 154th Engineer Battalion. During the period 23 September to 20 October, RCT 321 had lost 98 men killed and 468 wounded, while killing more than 1,500 Japanese and capturing 108.

When the 81st Infantry Division assumed responsibility for the Umurbrogol Pocket, 3/321 was deployed at the eastern perimeter along the crests of Walt and Boyd Ridges with positions extending southward to the entrance of the Horseshoe; 2/321 occupied Hill 140 along the northern perimeter. The 1st Battalion was deployed along a line generally paralleling West Road. Manning the ring of encirclement along the southern perimeter of the pocket, in the vicinity of the Five Sisters and Death Valley, was 1/323 (See Map 15).

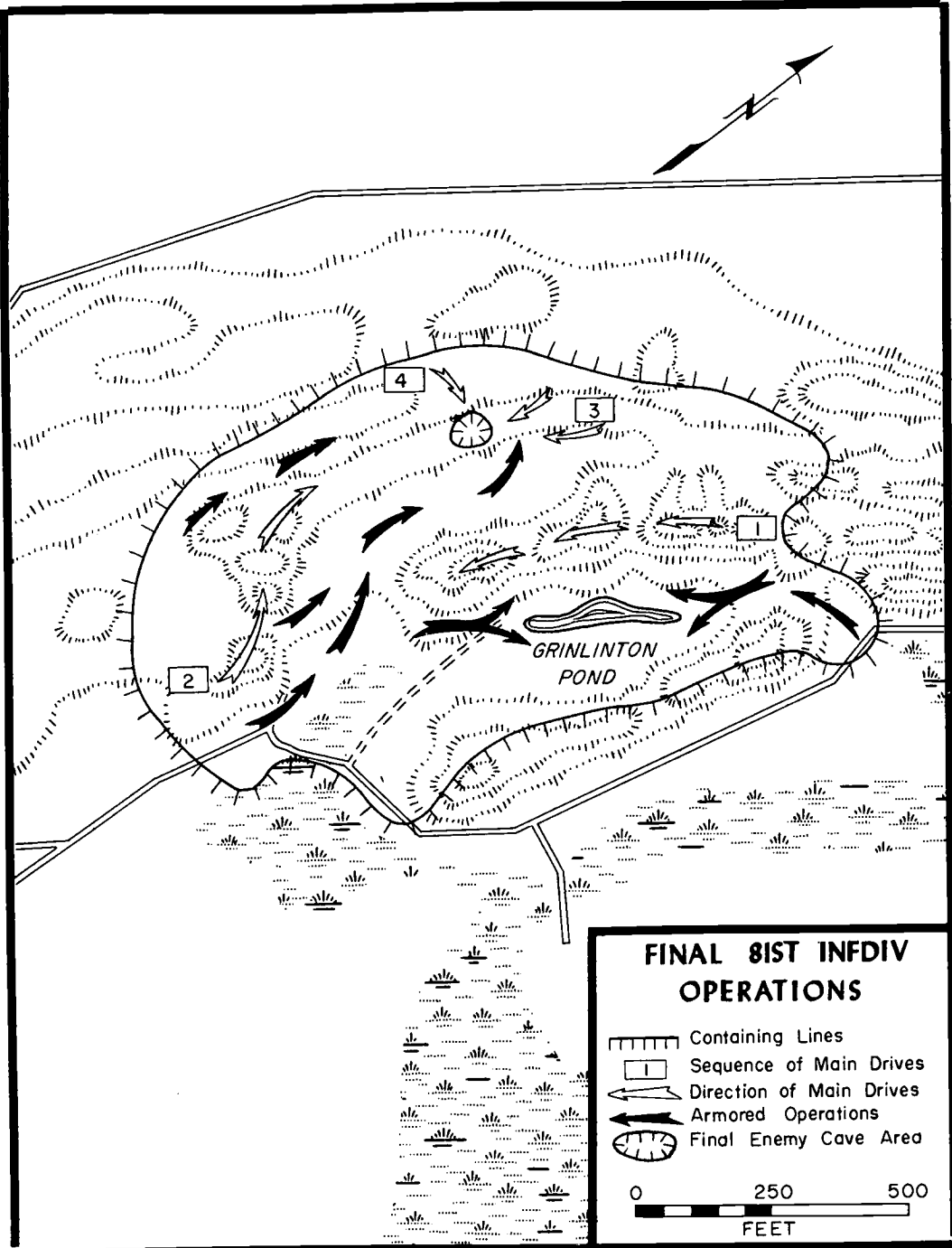
General Mueller's plan for the reduction of the Umurbrogol Pocket and for

the final elimination of all Japanese resistance on Peleliu was to tighten the ring of encirclement slowly and methodically into a relentless vise that would stifle all further resistance at a minimum loss of life to his command. This idea was not an original one. In fact, it closely resembled the tactics that Colonel Harris, commanding officer of the 5th Marines, had advocated several weeks earlier. The latter regiment, now under control of the 81st Infantry Division, spent its final days on Peleliu on the northern portion of the island and on those islands to the north of Peleliu that had previously been garrisoned by RCT 321. The defense of the beaches along the southernmost sector of Peleliu was assigned to the 726th Amphibious Tractor Battalion. The 81st Infantry Division artillery, which also exercised operational control over 4/11, the 3d Field Artillery Battalion, and the 8th Field Artillery Battalion, was assigned the mission of supporting RCT 321 in the defense of Peleliu and adjacent islands.²

For the remainder of 20 October, the 81st Infantry Division engaged mainly in reconnaissance for an attack scheduled for the following morning. Following a napalm bomb strike at 0800, 21 October, against Japanese positions in front of 1/321, the battalion jumped off

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *81st InfDiv OpRpt*; Historical Committee, *81st Infantry Division*; Smith, *Approach to the Philippines*; Morison, *Leyte*; Hough, *Assault on Peleliu*.

² 81st InfDiv FO 22, 20Oct44.



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from its positions along the northwestern edge of the pocket and advanced almost 100 yards towards the northern end of the China Wall and the northwest corner of the valley separating the China Wall from the Five Brothers. Subsequently, this valley was to become known as the Wildcat Bowl. During the afternoon, elements of the 2d Battalion seized the crest of the northernmost of the Five Brothers (hereafter referred to as Brother No. 1). Despite heavy fire from the enemy on Brother No. 3 and the northern end of the China Wall, the soldiers were able to consolidate their gains with the help of sandbags, which had to be manhandled up the ridge. They offered effective protection from Japanese small arms fire. During the night, the Japanese attempted to drive the soldiers from Brother No. 1, but were repulsed with grenades. A similar attempt, to scale the west wall of Walt Ridge and drive the soldiers from the crest, ended in failure. The Japanese were somewhat more successful in infiltrating a small group into the rear areas of 1/321 and 1/323, but aside from causing considerable excitement and confusion, the infiltrators did little damage and were forced to retreat.

Operations on 21 October began again when Corsairs of VMF-114 dropped napalm on Japanese positions in the vicinity of the Horseshoe. The frequent calls for air support from the Army division came as something of a surprise to the Marine aviators, who as early as 17 October had thought "that no further call would come for Napalm bombs—so short appeared our lines."³

But in the days that followed, calls for air support increased. The soldiers asked for unfused bombs to be dropped over specifically designated areas of the pocket. The napalm was subsequently fired by mortar shells. These tactics were successful, and machine gunners on the ground were able to destroy a good many Japanese trying to get away from the resulting inferno. In order to assist the aviators in pinpointing targets, the soldiers marked the end of the Horseshoe and its western approaches with smoke pots. Sixteen aircraft participated in this pinpoint bombing in the early morning and 12 more in the late afternoon. In the words of the Marine aviators: "We were using up a goodly supply of belly tanks, but everyone was being satisfied and Japs exterminated without commensurate losses to ourselves."⁴

During the morning of 21 October, 1/321 attacked southward upon completion of their air strike. Japanese automatic weapons from caves on the western slope of Brother No. 3 forced the soldiers to halt their advance after a gain of less than a hundred yards. A patrol from 2/321 attempted to capture Brother No. 1, but the attack faltered because of heavy enemy fire from the eastern slope of the hill. During the afternoon a combat patrol succeeded in seizing the northern part of Brother No. 1 and immediately sandbagged the position in anticipation of an enemy counterattack.

Meanwhile, men of 3/321, supported by tanks and flamethrowers, entered Horseshoe Valley from the south under

³ VMF-114 WarD, Oct44.

⁴ *Ibid.*

cover of a smoke screen laid down on the area between Walt Ridge and Brother No. 5. This force attacked Japanese lurking in caves along the base of the Five Brothers and Walt Ridge. Upon completion of their mission, the soldiers withdrew from the valley.

On 22 October, 2/321 seized Brothers No. 1, 2, and 3. The 3d Battalion launched another sortie in Horseshoe Valley supported by 2 tank platoons, 3 tank destroyers, and 2 LVTs equipped with flamethrowers. The combined infantry-armored force swept into the valley through the gap between Walt and Boyd Ridges and blasted caves along the bases of the remainder of the Five Brothers and the northeastern slopes of the Five Sisters. At least 34 Japanese were killed in this action, and others were sealed in caves. At the end of the day, the soldiers established a line of defense along the western base of Walt Ridge and during the night held this position against determined Japanese counterattacks in which an estimated 20 of the enemy were killed.

For the next two days, there was little change in the lines, though on 23 October 2/321 seized Brother No. 4 and fortified it with sandbag emplacements. In an effort to confine the Japanese further, a company of 3/321 blocked the south exit from Horseshoe Valley, while another company occupied positions around Grinlinton Pond to deny the Japanese access to fresh water. The toughest resistance encountered during 23 October was in the zone of attack of 1/321, whose advance towards the very heart of the pocket ran into such heavy defenses that gains had to be measured in feet. The difficulties facing

the battalion at this juncture were a combination of extremely unfavorable terrain and determined resistance. The division historian described the situation graphically:

The limited avenues of approach to the Japanese positions and their strength made it necessary to construct sandbag fortifications along the route of advance as fast as the advance was made. In effect, the sandbags had to be used instead of armor in ground too rough and steep for tanks. Without sandbags the troops, on the sides and tops of ridges and peaks, were completely exposed to accurate enemy rifle fire. At times, it was necessary to push sandbags forward with poles so that a first layer could be placed which would protect the men who crawled forward to finish the work. Advance in this manner was slow and tedious but accomplished with a minimum of casualties.⁵

On 25 October, RCT 323, which had arrived from Ulithi, relieved the 1st and 2d Battalions, RCT 321. Control of operations against the Umurbrogol pocket passed from Colonel Dark to Colonel Arthur P. Watson, commander of RCT 323. The 1st Battalion, RCT 323, occupied positions at the western and southwestern perimeter of the pocket. The 2d Battalion took over the lines south of the Five Sisters. A company of 1/323 took up station on the Five Brothers, while the remaining two companies moved into sandbagged positions along the northwest perimeter of the pocket. The men of 3/321 remained in sandbagged emplacements along the base of Walt Ridge and Horseshoe Valley. Effective 25 October, 3/321 was attached for operations to RCT 323.

⁵ Historical Committee, *81st Infantry Division*, pp. 175-177.

For the continuation of the attack against the Umurbrogol, two field artillery battalions and an engineer battalion would provide the necessary support.

During the remainder of 25 October the men of RCT 323 familiarized themselves with the terrain over which they were to operate. They also hauled supplies and strengthened defensive positions along the perimeter of the pocket. Two prisoners taken after nightfall revealed that 500-600 Japanese still remained in the pocket. Of this number, approximately half were sick or wounded and without medical care; the remainder were under orders to fight to the death.

In the course of 26 October, RCT 323 patrolled along the entire perimeter and blew caves in rear areas to prevent their reoccupation by the enemy. Shortly after noon a company engaged in searching out Japanese-occupied caves along the southern perimeter of the pocket suffered 4 killed and 29 wounded when a Japanese aerial bomb used as a land mine went off. A closer inspection of the area revealed that it was littered with aerial bombs, some of them cleverly booby-trapped by the Japanese. The night of 26-27 October was marked by numerous enemy probing attacks at various points within the perimeter. In a furious engagement at Brother No. 4, which the Japanese seemed determined to recapture, a hand grenade duel ended in the death of 30 Japanese. A party of seven Japanese hauling water from Grinlinton Pond was wiped out when soldiers from RCT 321 suddenly illuminated the area with improvised floodlights and opened fire with machine guns. The quantity of pyrotechnics ex-

ceeded at that time in an effort to foil Japanese attempts at infiltration led at least one observer to make this comment:

Both day and night there was constant firing. At night the area was kept under constant illumination. I counted as many as three 60mm illuminating shells in the air at a time.⁶

During the period from 26 October to 1 November, operations on Peleliu stagnated because of heavy rain, fog, and poor visibility. The men of the 81st Infantry Division utilized this time to improve their positions further. According to Colonel Nakagawa, "our units were encouraged by the rain which fell all through the day of the 28th."⁷ On the following day, the Japanese commander reported the strength of his garrison unit on Peleliu as approximately 590 men.⁸ Throughout the period of inclement weather, there was little ground action in the daytime, though the Japanese became aggressive after nightfall. For several nights in succession the Japanese main effort was directed against the Americans on Brother No. 4, but the infantrymen repulsed every attack and held their positions.

Some unusual activity around and over Peleliu developed at the end of the month. During the night of 28-29 October, a Japanese landing craft carrying torpedo tubes was sunk just off Purple Beach, after it had fired a torpedo at the beach without doing any damage. It could not be clearly established what the mission of this craft

⁶ Smith, *Narrative*, p. 117.

⁷ *Japanese CenPacOps*, p. 162.

⁸ *Ibid.*

had been. There were reports of additional enemy landing craft in the vicinity, though this information remained unconfirmed.⁹

Other evidence of unusual enemy activity from outside of the pocket persisted for the remainder of October. American surface craft sighted a mid-gut submarine near Peleliu and speculation arose that the submarine, in conjunction with the landing barge sunk during the preceding night, might be attempting to evacuate personnel from the Umurbrogol pocket. Shortly after dark on 29 October and again on 31 October, Japanese float planes dropped parachutes to which were attached baskets and cylinders containing hand grenades and signal equipment. Most of the parachutes fell outside of the perimeter and were recovered by the Americans. When questioned about this incident after the end of World War II, Lieutenant General Sadae Inoue, IJA, commanding Japanese forces in the Palau, volunteered the following information:

General Murai had requested that radio batteries be sent because his were almost run down, and complete breakdowns were frequent. We knew his position was somewhere on the ridge running along the west coast of Peleliu but we didn't know the exact location.¹⁰

At night the interception of enemy aircraft over Peleliu was made difficult because of poor ground radar coverage. Nevertheless, on 31 October Major

Norman L. Mitchell, a member of VMF (N)-541 intercepted and destroyed a Japanese floatplane over Peleliu Island. This was the only Japanese aircraft destroyed in the air by Marine aviation squadrons in the Palau.¹¹

Surprise encounters with isolated Japanese outside the Umurbrogol were not rare. In one instance, during the night 28-29 October, two enlisted men of VMF-114 thought that there was a "slant eyed gopher" outside their pup tent. In fact, the flaps were ripped open and buttons torn off. When the Marines reached for their weapons, the visitor became alarmed and fled. Another roving Japanese—or perhaps the same one—was spotted the following night near the airfield and killed when he failed to answer a challenge. A Japanese medical officer decided that continued resistance held little future for him and turned himself in to the Americans. This Japanese was "effusive, wanting to talk and to help—anxious to survive, he said, for the sake of science and research, to which he had always devoted himself. He spoke English fluently, although he had never been in the States."¹²

Because the Japanese were so unpredictable in their actions, General Mueller decided to take no chances. Beach defenses on Peleliu were manned at all times and certain units, including RCT 323 in the central combat zone, were required to furnish mobile reserve forces on call from division headquarters. Field and coast artillery units were prepared to fire antiboat missions

⁹ VMF-114 WarD, Oct44.

¹⁰ MajGen Paul J. Mueller, USA, ltr to Dir-MCHist, dtd 9Aug50, in *Peleliu Comment File*, Encl, 2dLt James J. Wickel, USA, interrogation of LtGen Sadae Inoue, IJA, dtd 23May47, hereafter *Inoue Interrogation*.

¹¹ VMF(N)—541 Hist, p. 7.

¹² VMF-114 WarD, Oct44.

and to assist in the beach defense in the event of an enemy landing. Amphibious patrols carried out repeated reconnaissance of the outlying islands. A number of observation posts, surface search radar stations, and searchlights were established on Peleliu and the outlying islands from which all approaches to Peleliu could be kept under constant observation. General Mueller established within the 81st Infantry Division a Ground Defense Headquarters with a mission of coordinating the activities of all organic and attached units in safeguarding Peleliu. The Ground Defense Headquarters received reports from all units charged with the operation of observation posts and radar stations and disseminated intelligence about the enemy and information about friendly ground, air, and naval forces.

When weather conditions improved on 1 November, General Mueller ordered the offensive against the Umurbrogol pocket to be resumed. Before an attack could be launched against the very heart of Japanese resistance, the area encompassing Wildcat Bowl and the China Wall, Hill 300, and the Five Sisters had to be secured.¹³ The mission of seizing both objectives was assigned to 2/323. The attack was to begin on 2 November and would be preceded by an air strike and a 25-minute mortar preparation.

The 2d Battalion attacked at 0630. Resistance was surprisingly light and

consisted only of sporadic sniper fire. Within two hours after jump-off, the soldiers had seized the top of Hill 300 and all of the Five Sisters. For the remainder of the day and part of the following night, the men consolidated the newly captured positions and erected sandbag fortifications. Japanese reaction remained feeble until shortly after midnight, when the enemy made an attempt to recapture the Five Sisters. The counterattack was repulsed, and 38 Japanese were killed in the action.¹⁴

Colonel Nakagawa, forced to concede that the situation for the Japanese on Peleliu was becoming more difficult, observed:

Fifty days have elapsed since the enemy landed on Peleliu. . . . Part of this enemy unit which entered Mt. Kansoku and the southern extremity of Mt. Oyama were observed strengthening their positions

Horseshoe Valley appears as Mortimer Valley in Army records. For the sake of continuity, Marine designations are used in this narrative. Army designations are given only to identify those terrain features not previously named by the Marines. For the sake of simplicity, Japanese designations for terrain features in the Umurbrogol Pocket have been omitted from the narrative whenever possible, though they occasionally appear in quotations from Japanese records. The most frequently named hills were as follows:

<i>Oyama</i>	—northern portion of China Wall harboring Japanese command post on Peleliu
<i>Nakayama</i>	—central and southern portion of China Wall
<i>Tenzan</i>	—Five Sisters
<i>Higashiyama</i>	—Walt Ridge
<i>Suifuyama or Suifuzan</i>	—Boyd Ridge and northern perimeter of pocket
<i>Kansokuyama</i>	—Hill 300

¹⁴ 81st InfDiv OpRpt, p. 75.

¹³ Army units on Peleliu frequently renamed ridges and valleys on Peleliu from earlier designations by the Marines. Army records refer to Hill 300 as Old Baldy, though the Marines had previously designed a ridge north of the Umurbrogol Pocket as Baldy Ridge.

with sandbags and wire entanglements. Our defense unit attacked this enemy unit every night but to no avail.¹⁵

At approximately noon, 3 November, 2/323 dispatched an infantry-tank patrol into Death Valley. This time the Japanese were prepared for the Americans, and the infantry was caught in the crossfire of enemy snipers hiding in the caves and holes along both sides of the valley wall. The advance halted, and the patrol returned to its starting point.

Lack of progress on the part of the Americans during 3 November did little to relieve the shortage that the Japanese inside the pocket were beginning to feel. Despite the rains of late October, there was an acute shortage of water, aggravated by the alertness of the Americans in preventing Japanese water-carriers from gaining access to Grinlinton Pond. For the first time since the beginning of the campaign, a shortage of ammunition was beginning to make itself felt, causing Colonel Nakagawa to cut the normal allowance of small arms ammunition by half. Even so, the Japanese commander glumly observed, "it was tentative as to whether it would last until 20 November."¹⁶ The attrition in the Japanese ranks also had reached a critical point. Japanese personnel in the pocket still fit for combat numbered approximately 350. This figure included men that had suffered minor wounds. In addition to these, there were 130 heavy casualties incapable of taking part in combat.¹⁷

During the period 4–9 November, operations on Peleliu once again came to

a virtual standstill. Heavy rains inundated the island, beginning on 4 November. Two days later a typhoon struck Peleliu and continued unabated until the morning of 8 November. During this time of enforced idleness, General Mueller ordered pack howitzers emplaced in the vicinity of the Five Sisters to support subsequent operations in Wildcat Bowl and along the eastern slopes of China Wall. Aside from isolated and feeble attempts to infiltrate the American lines, enemy activity within the pocket dropped sharply during this period. During the height of the storm a number of Japanese managed to slip out of the Umurbrogol Pocket and headed north, intent on escaping from the island. Members of RCT 321, stationed on the northern tip of Peleliu, spotted and killed a number of these infiltrators.

The ever-present danger of Japanese counterlandings on and around Peleliu was underscored once again on 9 November when a Japanese force estimated at 100 men stealthily crept ashore on Ngeregong, a small island about 9 miles northeast of the northern tip of Peleliu. A skirmish with a small Army force that was garrisoning the island ensued, following which the American soldiers withdrew under cover of 20mm and 40mm fire. For the remainder of the day, and throughout the following night, American patrol craft and destroyers shelled the island. In addition, a flight of 47 Navy aircraft bombed Ngeregong after dark. Most of the Japanese force had withdrawn to an adjacent island by this time, though one of the attacking aircraft was downed by enemy machine gun fire.

¹⁵ *Japanese CenPacOps*, p. 181.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 181–182.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

During 10 November, 51 Navy aircraft dropped a total of 3,900 pounds of bombs on Ngeregong. As added insurance against similar Japanese incursions, General Mueller ordered his troops to seize Gorokottan Island, located halfway between northern Peleliu and Ngeregong. Gorokottan Island was seized on 11 November. No Japanese were found on the island. After extensive preparations, elements of the 81st Infantry Division recaptured Ngeregong Island on 15 November. The landing came as an anticlimax. There was no opposition, and the only evidence of recent Japanese occupation of the island consisted of three dead Japanese in an advanced state of decomposition and some enemy ordnance equipment.

The final drive into the Umurbrogol Pocket resumed on 13 November, when 1/323 and 2/323 launched simultaneous attacks into Death Valley. The 1st Battalion, attacking out of the ridges to the west of the valley, made few gains. The advance of 2/323 was somewhat more successful, and the soldiers gained about 75 yards while moving northward along the eastern ridge of the China Wall. Though the enemy was still offering bitter resistance, his time in the Umurbrogol was running out. Colonel Nakagawa gloomily informed his superior on Babelthuap that ammunition, food, water, and radio batteries were running low. In describing the action on 13 November, the Japanese commander reported:

The enemy began attacking our defense line at Mt. Oyama. A part of the enemy force attacking from the west and south, the main force from the east. Our Defense Unit put up a stubborn resistance but the

enemy force successfully penetrated the defense line. This enemy force attacked the men of our Defense Unit hidden in shelters with flamethrowers and guns.¹⁸

The Americans advanced slowly and steadily between 14 and 21 November, compressing the Umurbrogol Pocket. As a means of reducing the last Japanese defenses on Peleliu, ingenious soldiers set up fuel tanks in covered positions about 300 yards from the Japanese caves, then hooked up a hose to the tanks and poured oil into the most prominent enemy caves. This oil was ignited by white phosphorus hand grenades lobbed into the caves after the spraying. This method yielded good results and henceforth became an effective improvisation. As the drive through the Wildcat Bowl and Death Valley continued, flamethrowers, demolition teams, and armored bulldozers followed by tanks and LVTs, eliminated as many enemy caves as could be reached. Colonel Nakagawa, watching the Americans gradually approach his command post, reached some valid conclusions, observing:

. . . It is our guess that the enemy in the northern part of Mt. Oyama are planning to capture our Defense Unit Headquarters. . . . The enemy on the east side of Oyama Mountain penetrated our defense line and advanced towards the Defense Unit Headquarters, at the same time attacking our men, who were hidden in shelters, with flamethrowers. In this attack the casualties of our Defense Unit were heavy. . . . The men of our Defense Unit still capable of fighting number approximately 150. This includes light casualties.¹⁹

¹⁸ *Japanese CenPacOps*, p. 197.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 197-198.

Up to this point, Major General Kenjiro Murai, advisor to Colonel Nakagawa, had remained completely in the background, though on occasion he acted as liaison between Colonel Nakagawa and General Inoue. In fact, General Murai remained so inconspicuous throughout the fighting that many Japanese were unaware of his presence on Peleliu. Once before, in early November, General Murai had attempted to obtain General Inoue's permission to launch an all-out attack against the Peleliu airfield. At the time, General Inoue had issued the following order:

It is easy to die but difficult to live on. We must select the difficult course, and continue to fight because of the influence on the morale of the Japanese people. Saipan was lost in a very short time because of vain Banzai attacks, with the result that the people at home suffered a drop in morale.²⁰

Now that the end for the Japanese on Peleliu was approaching, General Murai informed General Inoue that he was going to make a final, all-out attack against the Americans. Once again General Inoue dissuaded Murai from this course of action, pointing out that such an attack would only waste his men. Instead, General Murai was to hole up, play it safe, wait for the Americans to approach more closely, and then kill off as many as possible.²¹

Attrition of the Japanese remaining in the pocket increased at a rapid rate.

²⁰ MajGen Paul J. Mueller, USA, ltr to Dir, MarCorpsHist dtd 9Aug50, Encl, 2dLt James J. Wickel, USA, interrogation of Col Tokechi Tada, IJA, dtd 24May47, hereafter *Tada Interrogation*.

²¹ Inoue interview, dtd Mar50, in *Worden ltr*.

During the night of 17-18 November the enemy made widespread attempts to escape from the pocket, and 33 were killed. By 20 November, Japanese resistance stiffened, and American combat patrols drew heavy fire from enemy snipers and machine guns in caves that had not been destroyed in previous attacks. Throughout the night and during the early part of the next day, the Wildcats attacked these caves. As a result, by noon of 21 November, patrols were able to operate without opposition throughout Wildcat Bowl and in the southern portion of Death Valley. On 22 November a company of infantry succeeded in scaling the north end of the China Wall; another company approached the Japanese command post from the west-northwest and gained 75 yards; a third company advanced 25-50 yards at the southern end of the China Wall. By the end of 22 November, the Japanese pocket had been reduced to an area approximately 285 yards in length from north to south and 125 yards wide. To enable tanks and LVT flamethrowers to bring their fire to bear on the last Japanese defenses in the center of the China Wall, engineers began the construction of a ramp up the east wall at the northern terminus of the Wildcat Bowl.

The battle for the last Japanese redoubt on Peleliu began in earnest on 22 November. Colonel Nakagawa reported that an enemy force was attacking the main point of the Japanese line with flamethrowers, and that his men were on the verge of collapse. The Japanese held on during 23 November, but by the next day the end had become imminent. As the Americans closed in

on his command post, Colonel Nakagawa made his last report to Babelthuap, saying:

Our Defense Units were on the verge of being completely annihilated. Therefore the unit destroyed the 2d Infantry regimental colors which they had in their possession. . . . All documents were burned. . . . Since 1800 the personnel left in this Defense Unit were Captain Nemoto and 56 men. This number split into 17 teams and decided to put on a last raid. . . . Splitting of men into 17 teams was completed at 1700 hours of the 24th. Following the Commander's wishes, we will attack the enemy everywhere. This will be the last message we will be able to send or receive.²²

During the night 24-25 November both General Murai and Colonel Nakagawa committed suicide. The attempts of the remaining Japanese to break out of the tight ring of encirclement were doomed to failure, and the Wildcats killed 45 Japanese, including two officers. Additional Japanese were killed during the following days, though the men of RCT 323 noticed as early as the afternoon of 24 November that resistance had vanished almost completely. On 26 November, tanks and LVT flamethrowers moved up the newly finished ramp and began to fire on caves and other defenses along the center of the China Wall. On the morning of 27 November, eight rifle companies gingerly converged on the center of the China Wall. There was no resistance and only silence greeted the advancing soldiers. At 1100, Colonel Watson, commander of RCT 323, reported to General Mueller that organized resistance on Peleliu had come

to an end. The enemy had fulfilled his determination to fight unto death.

Even the end of organized resistance on Peleliu did not mean that peace had finally returned to the island. During the weeks and months that followed, individual Japanese that had previously escaped annihilation were either captured or killed. There were bizarre overtones to an unusual operation. Both General Murai and Colonel Nakagawa were posthumously promoted to the rank of lieutenant general effective 31 December 1944.²³ On 13 January 1945, Major General Mueller turned over responsibility for ground defense of Peleliu to the Island Command. Five days later Japanese landing craft discharged troops at Purple and White Beaches. Mission of the Japanese landing force was to destroy aircraft, ammunition dumps, and the American headquarters on Peleliu. Even though the attackers succeeded in making their way inland, the attempt failed.²⁴ In a series of skirmishes reminiscent of the heavy fighting of the past months, the enemy had to be routed once again from caves by infantrymen of the Peleliu Ground Defense Force, supported by flamethrowers.

The Ground Defense Force, composed of elements of the 81st Infantry Di-

²³ Ltr, Japanese Demobilization Bureau, Repatriation Relief Agency to Headquarters, Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers, dtd 14Apr50.

²⁴ "This force failed to reach our planes, but was armed with spears and plenty of fire producing grenades." BGen M. B. Bell, USA, ltr to Head, HistBr, G-3 Div, HQMC, dtd 24Jun66, in *Peleliu Comment File*.

²² *Japanese CenPacOps*, p. 200.

vision and the 12th Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion, was under the command of Marine Brigadier General Harold D. Campbell, the Island Commander. The action ended in the death of 71 and the capture of 2 Japanese.²⁵ Barely eight months later, Lieutenant General Inoue, Commanding the Japanese Forces in the Palaus, surrendered unconditionally to General Campbell's successor, Marine Brigadier General Ford O. Rogers. At the time of the Japanese surrender in the northern Palaus, 39,997 persons came under American control. This number consisted of 18,473 Japanese soldiers, 6,404 Navy personnel, 9,750 civilians, and 5,350 natives.²⁶ Following the Japanese surrender, personnel of the Peleliu Island Command assumed responsibility for the evacuation and repatriation of Japanese military and civilian personnel from the Palau Islands, though as late as February 1946 a thorough search of Babelthuap Island had to be carried out in order to apprehend and return all Japanese recalcitrants and stragglers attempting to avoid repatriation.²⁷

It was thought that peace had finally returned to Peleliu on 21 April 1947, when a Japanese lieutenant and 26 men formally gave up in one of the last surrender ceremonies of World War II.²⁸ Around 1949 or 1950 a group of Peleliu natives went to hunt wild pigeons and wild chicken with .22 rifles and U.S.

carbines on one of the islands three miles north of Peleliu. What they flushed out, in addition to birds, has been described by the principal of the Peleliu Elementary School:

During this hunting there was a Japanese Army man who was at the time hiding in a cave of Ngercheu Island, who became frightened by the explosions of rifles and carbines. He then ran out from the cave to the seashore where an old Peleliu man by the name of Sisior was fishing nearby in his canoe. The Japanese ran up to him and asked him to save him from the enemy who were firing their guns in the forests and mountains. After the Japanese man came out his clothings were made out of rice sacks of Manila fiber. His beards have grown and hanged down to his hips. This man was captured and turned over to the District Administration to be sent to Japan.²⁹

Five years later, a cave-dwelling Korean was seized on Peleliu by natives who had occasionally found food missing from their gardens. The Korean, a former civilian employee of the Japanese Navy, was likewise turned over to the authorities.³⁰ At the time of this writing, one can only guess that these were the last survivors of the Japanese garrison on Peleliu. Twenty years after the end of World War II, the debris of battle still litters the island, and a few Japanese may still be hiding in the Umurbrogol ridges, awaiting the command of the Emperor to fight their way to total extinction.

²⁵ Peleliu Island Command WarD, Feb45.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, Sep45.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, Feb46.

²⁸ McMillan, *The Old Breed*, pp. 340-341.

²⁹ Kulas Sengebau ltr to Head, HistBr, G-3 Div, HQMC, dtd 28Sep65, in *Peleliu Comment File*.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

CAMPAIGN LESSONS LEARNED³¹

A number of factors combined to set the Peleliu operation apart from the others that had preceded it and those that were to follow. First, there was a poorly developed staging area on Pavuvu with all the inherent disadvantages of muddy roads and inadequate water supply and camp facilities. Nevertheless, the 1st Marine Division did not recommend staging to another area from Pavuvu because the time required would have cut deeply into the training period. Another factor of great concern to General Rupertus was the shortage of materiel, which persisted during the division's stay on Pavuvu. Critical equipment, such as armored amphibians, amphibian tractors, flamethrowers, demolitions, BARs, bazookas, engineering equipment, tank and tractor spare parts, signal equipment, and waterproofing equipment did not reach the division until the last stages of the training schedule, and, in some instances, upon completion of loading.

At the time it embarked for the Peleliu Operation, the 1st Marine Division consisted of 843 Marine officers and 15,616 enlisted Marines, not including the rear echelon of 103 officers and 1,668 enlisted, which remained on Pavuvu. The division departed from the staging area with a five percent personnel overage, the first time that this Marine division embarked overstrength

for an operation.³² Prior to embarkation, changes were made in the assignment of medical personnel by increasing the number of hospital corpsmen organic to the infantry battalions from 32 to 40, which made it possible to attach two corpsmen to each platoon. Each infantry battalion assigned 32 men as stretcher bearers. These Marines were trained in casualty evacuation and first aid procedures. Normally, division bandsmen acted as stretcher bearers in combat. On Peleliu and later on Okinawa, however, the 1st Division band was trained to man part of the division CP defense perimeter and to serve as stretcher bearers. These assignments were expected to raise the efficiency of the combat troops and improve the morale of the fighting forces.³³

Even during the planning phase of Operation STALEMATE, it was apparent that the 1st Marine Division was embarking on a campaign that differed from previous operations in the jungles of Guadalcanal and New Britain. The division initially would have to cross a 600-700 yard reef all along the prospective beachhead, a process that the 2d Marine Division had found costly in earlier Central Pacific operations. The division on Peleliu could expect to operate in terrain that was completely at variance with anything previously encountered, for Peleliu contained some of the most rugged and easily defended ground yet seen by American forces in the Pacific. Beyond the rugged terrain, the 1st Marine Division faced a determined enemy, who exploited almost

³¹ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *IIIAC OpRpt*; *1st MarDiv SAR*; VMF-114 WarD, Sep44; Smith, *Narrative*; Isely and Crowl, *U. S. Marines and Amphibious War*; Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*.

³² *1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase I, Anx A, p. 2.

³³ *Ibid.*, Anx D, p. 2.

impregnable defenses to the utmost. In contrast to earlier campaigns, the Japanese on Peleliu conserved manpower and materiel. The traditional, reckless *banzai* charge, the final symbol of defiance in the face of certain death in earlier operations, had gone out of style. The enemy, well trained and dug in, no longer expended men and equipment in such heroic but useless gestures.³⁴

The Japanese had prepared themselves thoroughly to repel a landing on the beaches. Careful planning of the static beach defenses was evident not only from their effectiveness but also from detailed sketches, which fell into American hands as the campaign progressed. Colonel Nakagawa made and rehearsed several plans for counter-attacking assumed landings. He also reorganized several Japanese companies into special counterattack units. The Japanese commander further improvised a company trained to swim out to the landing craft and sink them with mines or destroy their occupants with hand grenades. One platoon of infantry had been trained to ride tanks into battle. Several teams of two or three men were taught to infiltrate and attempt to blow up American tanks or amphibian tractors. Among new Japanese weapons, a 150mm mortar was found on Peleliu. The Japanese had stored four of these mortars behind a hastily constructed position. In appearance, the weapon was an oversized 81mm mortar, similar to the American version. Fifty rounds of ammunition were found.

There was no evidence that the

Japanese ever made use of the new 150mm mortars on Peleliu. On the other hand, a new development in Japanese weaponry was observed with the capture of a 200mm rocket, which was eight inches in diameter and 43 inches in length. At least four of these new rockets were fired from an unknown position. Three of them exploded with minor effect. The fourth was a dud because the enemy failed to replace the shipping plug with the fuze. The rocket closely resembled an obsolete German type. It was fired electrically, probably from a simple launching platform or cage. The head consisted of 8 by 25-inch thin-walled explosive container filled with picric acid and flaked TNT, and an 18-inch propellant case closed by a tube plate. The propellant charge probably was black powder. There was no evidence of fins or of a gyro-stabilizing device. The rocket was easily observed as it wobbled in flight like a poor football pass. Its velocity was slow and its range was estimated to be less than 1,500 yards.³⁵

The Japanese on Peleliu were adequately clothed, and scattered clothing dumps were found in the southern and extreme northern part of the island. Food, particularly canned fish, canned meat, and rice was abundant. Ammunition was plentiful for all weapons except the 200mm short-barreled naval gun and the 150mm mortar. Enemy supply dumps were small and well-dispersed. As on Saipan, the dispersal of supply dumps became a major disadvantage for the Japanese, for once they had been pushed back into small pockets, they

³⁴ *Ibid.*, Anx A, p. 1.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, Anx B, p. 24.

were effectively cut off from most of these dumps.

The enemy defensive plan for Peleliu was one of defense in depth in all sectors. All pillboxes and casemates were in logical commanding positions, and all were linked in a system of mutual support. When driven from his coastal positions along White and Orange Beaches, the enemy was able to fall back to prepared positions on the high ground to the north. Coastal installations on some of the beaches were protected by pillboxes and casemates, whose firing ports were sited for fire on the Americans attempting to wheel northward from the landing beaches. Even after the Marines had overrun the Japanese secondary lines and seized commanding ground, the enemy was able to withdraw to positions, both natural and prepared, that enabled him to continue organized resistance.

On the high ground separating White and Orange beaches, two casemates and a large number of pillboxes had been established in such a way that they provided a field of fire covering both beaches. Most of the Japanese defensive installations were in defilade from the sea, particularly the two casemates, which were 30 yards apart and sited to fire south on Orange Beach and north on White Beach. Inland from Purple Beach, the Japanese had dug into the coral and echeloned three casemates containing respectively one 75mm mountain gun, one 37mm gun, and one 25mm ground-mount automatic anti-aircraft cannon depressed for horizontal fire. There were at least one casemate and six well-constructed pillboxes on the southern peninsula of Purple Beach.

The casemate was equipped with a 37mm gun to cover the entrance to the southern mangrove swamp.

To further impede progress of the American landing force, the Japanese had buried numerous aircraft bombs on all paths leading inland from Purple Beach, as well as elsewhere on the island. The island also abounded in anti-tank ditches and obstacles. In the vicinity of the airfield, the Japanese used some scarecrows. They were made of fronds from coconut palms, with a coconut stuck on the top. The dummies were so constructed that the coconut was just visible over the parapet of the trench.

In view of their defensive preparations and high state of morale, it is not surprising that the Japanese felt that they had an excellent chance to beat off any American attack. For the Marines, Peleliu offered an opportunity to prove again the soundness of the amphibious doctrine developed over a period of many years. The very fact that an amphibious force was able to establish a beachhead in full view of the enemy on a heavily defended island in an operation lacking the element of surprise speaks for itself.

Preparations for the operation were thorough and extensive as every supporting arm and staff section applied the lessons previously learned at Guadalcanal and Cape Gloucester. Prior to D-Day, no amphibious scout patrols or reconnaissance landing parties went ashore on Peleliu. In their place, underwater demolition teams, attached to the naval task force, reconnoitered the reef and offshore waters near the landing beaches and destroyed obstacles and

mines. Data pertaining to the reefs, water depths, tides, currents, and surf, location and nature of mines, obstacles, and barriers was promptly forwarded via radio dispatch to all ship and troop commanders in the 1st Marine Division convoy.

Few American offensive actions in the Pacific Theater were as dependent on the use of amphibian vehicles in assault and supply as was the operation at Peleliu. The crossing of the wide barrier reef surrounding the island was accomplished entirely by these vehicles. LVTs were practically the only means of getting American troops, equipment, and ammunition ashore during the initial landing. They continued to be the primary means of supply even after portions of the island had been secured. They were of great value in evacuating the wounded and performed excellent service in carrying water and ammunition to the front lines from beach supply dumps. DUKWs provided the primary transport for artillery, in addition to carrying 37mm guns, radio jeeps, and other equipment required for the assault. Even though 26 LVTs were knocked out by enemy fire on D-Day, the value of this amphibian to the landing force was inestimable. LVT(A)s saw extensive night patrol work in the waters to the north of Peleliu and were prepared to engage any barges or similar surface craft that might attempt to reinforce the enemy or evacuate him from the island.

Two types of LVTs, the LVT(2) and the LVT(4), were used at Peleliu. Of the two vehicles, the latter proved to be much more versatile and useful. No mechanical failures of the ramp were

experienced; the position of the engine in the LVT(4) facilitated its maintenance, and the vehicle afforded more protection for the assault troops who disembarked from the rear. The only disadvantage observed in the LVT(4) was an inadequate cooling system which caused the engine to overheat.³⁵ From observations made during the Peleliu landings it became apparent that DUKWs should not be employed as assault vehicles unless they were provided with some armament. The DUKWs proved more vulnerable to enemy fire than the amphibian tractors and required ideal terrain to operate at peak efficiency. They were unsatisfactory as prime movers for amphibian trailers, but could be used to advantage in carrying small rolling stock, artillery, and in ship to shore movement where the reef was not too rugged or the enemy fire too heavy.

The landing of artillery on Peleliu was delayed by heavy enemy artillery and mortar fire on the beaches, which seriously depleted the number of LVTs available. As a result of the holdup, the firing batteries came ashore in a piecemeal fashion, though all 75mm batteries were in position by H plus 7. Reconnaissance for the 105mm howitzer battalions proved difficult because their prearranged position areas were still in enemy hands. On D-Day, the 3d Battalion, 11th Marines, was able to land only one battery, which fired southward in direct support of the 7th Marines. The remaining two batteries came ashore, but remained in DUKWs. Both batteries were dispatched to sea to re-

³⁵ *Ibid.*, Anx F, p. 4.

embark on LSTs for the night. During these two trips across the reefs, three DUKWs sank during the night, along with the 105mm howitzers and other material aboard. For the remainder of the Peleliu operation, 1st Marine Division artillery performed very satisfactorily, subject to a temporary shortage of ammunition and limitations imposed by the terrain. During the later stages of the campaign, high angle fire was out of the question because of the restricted area in which the Japanese were trapped.

During this period, batteries and single guns of all calibers were employed so that they could fire in several directions. These weapons were used for sniping at individuals and small groups of Japanese, as well as for closing caves, obstructing paths and roads, and interdicting the waterholes. It became evident during the very first day of the Peleliu operation that a need existed for a short-range, high-angle weapon that could be employed as artillery. Subsequently, wherever action was limited to a small pocket, this need became critical. The 60mm and 81mm infantry mortars proved inadequate. Furthermore, the latter was too unreliable to furnish the volume of controlled fire required under the circumstances. On the other hand, illuminating shells, fired from 60mm mortars, were called for by all units in unexpectedly great quantities. A new type of ammunition, it furnished needed illumination and appeared to provide a feeling of confidence and security to the troops of the using units.³⁶

During the final reduction of the Umurbrogol Pocket, Army 4.2-inch mortars were used with great success; a 60mm shoulder mortar employed for the first time by the 1st Marine Division on Peleliu was not so well received. Despite its effectiveness in reducing caves and pillboxes, the latter weapon proved too heavy, and certain of its components exhibited structural weaknesses. The recoil of the mortar was so great that it became necessary to replace the gunner after two to four rounds had been fired.³⁷

Difficulties were encountered with the offensive hand grenade, whose very name was considered a misnomer because of its relative ineffectiveness. The grenade was constructed to detonate on impact, but since it had no fragmentation effect, it was ineffective against materiel and useful against personnel only to a very limited extent. It was dangerous to handle, and two men of 1/1 had their hands blown off in the act of throwing a grenade of this type. Since fuzes for the grenade were supplied separately, it proved difficult to keep grenades and fuzes together in equal numbers.³⁸

In contrast to the dubious performance of the shoulder mortar, another new weapon, the Navy Mk 1 flamethrower, proved vastly superior to anything of this type the 1st Marine Division had used on previous occasions. The weapon, modelled after the Canadian Ronson flamethrower, had been modified at the Navy Yard, Pearl Harbor, to

³⁶ *IIIAC OpRpt*, Encl H, p. 5.

³⁷ *1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase II, Anx A, p. 4.

³⁸ *IIIAC OpRpt*, Encl H, p. 6.

eliminate mechanical and technical difficulties. Prior to the Peleliu operation, the 1st Marine Division received three of these flamethrowers, together with four LVT(4)s for mounting the weapons. A fourth LVT(4) was used as a supply carrier for the flamethrowers. The new weapons were assigned to the 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion. Initial tests indicated that the range of the flamethrower was 75 yards with gasoline and oil mixture, 150 yards with napalm. Duration of fire was 55 seconds for gasoline and oil mixture, and 80 seconds for napalm.³⁹ Because of the shortage and late arrival of pack-type or portable flamethrowers, no distribution of them was prescribed for the regiments. One method was to retain 19 portable flamethrowers and three bazookas under battalion control. To these were added a heavy demolitions unit. This group, called in some cases Battalion Weapons Platoon, was composed of 60 men drawn from the rifle companies. This left the companies 10 or 15 men understrength, but the rifle platoons were generally unimpaired in strength.

Flamethrowers were used tactically in pairs, operated by 5-man flamethrower groups. Two men were assigned to each flamethrower and the fifth man was group leader. Each group had a machine gun cart on which it mounted and transported two flamethrowers and refilling equipment consisting of two cylinders and two expeditionary water cans. Flamethrowers were waterproofed and rigged so that they could be dragged through surf and put into action in a few seconds. Assault companies each

had a flamethrower group to start with and received additional flamethrowers from the battalion. During the operational phase on Peleliu, flamethrowers, both portable and vehicle-mounted, played an extremely important part in eliminating troublesome caves, pillboxes, and other enemy obstacles.

Combat engineer units landed with the assault waves and proceeded under the control of combat team commanders. All organizational equipment was landed during the assault phase, though some difficulty was experienced in landing priority items, such as water purification and distillation units. Combat engineer companies performed demolition tasks as well as other normal functions. On occasion, regimental commanders used engineers as infantry.

Prior to the Peleliu landings, intelligence reports had indicated that water supply would be the greatest engineer problem and that there was no source of fresh water. On the basis of this information, additional distillation units were carried ashore and only five purification units. Subsequent to the landings, it became apparent that wells left by the enemy and those dug by the engineers were sufficient to provide for the needs of the 1st Marine Division. Water loaded in drums by the division quartermaster on Pavuvu was unpalatable because drums and cans previously had been used to store petroleum and had not been thoroughly cleansed before being filled with water. The condition of these containers, combined with condensation and rust, resulted in much misery to the Marines ashore during the first two days of the campaign. Heavy engineer equipment arrived on

³⁹ *1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase II, Anx A, p. 6.

Peleliu on D plus 4, though unloading was not completed for an additional six days. The 33d Naval Construction Battalion immediately began work on the existing fighter strip and by D plus 20 had also completed work on a bomber strip.

Armor played an important part on Peleliu, and its presence afforded considerable support to the Marines even in terrain that normally did not favor armored operations. Prior to the departure of the division from Pavuvu, .30 caliber machine guns were substituted for the .50 caliber guns on all tanks. As a result, the tank antiaircraft machine gun could be dismounted and used on the ground, while the .30 caliber regular ammunition was handy in an emergency. All tanks landed had been waterproofed by installation of standard deep water fording kits. As installation of these kits was an innovation unfamiliar to tank maintenance personnel, one tank was first waterproofed and tested. After two unsuccessful attempts, a correct procedure was established. During the third test the pilot tank remained in seven feet of water for 20 minutes with no leakage.

Another improvisation was made when it was found that the LCT ramp would frequently fly up as the tank ran off the LCT. In doing so, it ripped off the exhaust waterproofing on the rear of the tank. Two tongue-like metal extensions, each four feet long, 18 inches wide, and made of one-half inch steel plating were welded on the LCT ramp. These extensions were so placed that as the tank ran off the ramp, the vehicle tracks ran over the extensions. Thus the ramp was held down until the rear

waterproofing was clear of the ramp. The commander of LCT Flotilla 6 effected this improvisation on all LCTs employed in the operation. Tank-infantry telephone extensions were improvised and mounted on the right rear bustle of all tanks. The telephone and cord were carried in a .30 caliber machine gun ammunition box welded on the rear armor face. The telephones were generally unsatisfactory in combat. Most of them soon became inoperative due to water damage, enemy fire, and lack of any self-winding feature necessary to retract the telephone extension.⁴⁰

The 1st Tank Battalion resorted to an innovation during the assault on Peleliu. Each of the six LCTs, in addition to carrying five tanks, also had an LVT loaded on the rampway. The guide LVTs disembarked first, with a tank NCO aboard equipped with a portable radio for communication with the tanks. Each LVT led its tank platoon in column formation to the shore, detouring underwater potholes, shell craters, and coral obstacles. This innovation proved highly successful since no tanks were lost in crossing the reef due to underwater hazards, and the tank landing was accomplished without delay. Guide LVTs for tanks, as pioneered at Peleliu, were used in subsequent operations.⁴¹

Throughout the reef crossing, all tanks drew heavy artillery and mortar fire. Over half of the tanks received from one to four hits during the 10-minute reef crossing, though none was put out of commission. The fact that

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, Anx J, p. 2.

⁴¹ *Stuart ltr.*

the suspension systems and lower hulls were under water and therefore protected at this time no doubt prevented the loss of several tanks. All tanks were landed by H plus 18. This was much earlier than in any previous Marine operation. The early tank landing proved most wise, because tanks lent early impetus to the assault inland. The timely landing of tanks gave infantry commanders the means to destroy many direct fire weapons on the beaches, including gun emplacements and numerous beach machine guns.⁴²

The 1st Marine Division had initially requested ships to land all of its tanks for the seizure of Peleliu, but the shipping made available permitted employment of only 30 tanks. Sixteen had to be left with the rear echelon. In the course of the Peleliu operation these tanks were badly needed, and the division was handicapped by their absence during the early phase of the operation, when a particular requirement for armor existed. The insufficient number of tanks that went ashore delayed complete seizure of the airfield. Tanks could have prevented additional casualties during the early days of the campaign.

For the fighting on Peleliu and Ngesebus tanks were used to support the general advance and destroy pillboxes, bunkers, and automatic weapons directly impeding the advance of the infantry. Tank-dozers proved valuable in filling antitank ditches and clearing logs and debris. Of the three tank-dozers landed, only one remained in operation throughout the campaign. A mod-

ified light tank, the E4-5 Mechanized Flamethrower, proved a good small-capacity weapon, but its use was limited. The tank was required to expose itself at a time when it was least able to protect itself because of the displacement of the bow machine gun. As a result, little use was made of the tank-mounted flamethrower in the reduction of bunkers and pillboxes, because its range was too short and its capacity too low to be really effective.

Tank supply and maintenance was a sore point during the Peleliu operation. The only tank supplies landed on D-Day were those that accompanied the tanks in the six guide LVTs. Additional ammunition and fuel, which was to have been landed by the second and third trip amphibians assigned to regimental combat teams, never arrived. Ammunition supply for tanks at the end of D-Day was critical, and only the salvaging of shells and bullets from 10 disabled tanks enabled the armor to resume the attack on the following day. An overly optimistic logistic concept of the Peleliu operation resulted in an entirely inadequate amount of spare parts and maintenance equipment being taken forward. As a result, the chief supply of spare parts were those that could be salvaged from completely knocked out tanks. Maintenance personnel suffered considerable casualties in stripping tanks in exposed positions. Maintenance was also handicapped by the fact that only one tank retriever was taken forward.

Of the 30 tanks that went ashore on Peleliu, only one remained completely unscathed; each of the remainder was put out of action at one time or another.

⁴² *Ibid.*

The number of operational tanks never fell below 18 and averaged 20. All operational tanks were used continuously for 16 consecutive days of heavy combat. Only nine were a total loss. Tank reconnaissance personnel were landed with each assault infantry battalion headquarters, in advance of the tanks, and were intended to meet the tank unit commander and guide him to the landing team command posts. The tank reconnaissance teams did not function in this manner. They either became casualties or were pinned down by the heavy fire falling on the beaches at that time. The tanks moved inland to positions offering maximum protection. Crews then dismounted long enough to remove waterproofing while tank officers oriented themselves to locate their infantry units. Time required to locate landing team command posts, become oriented, receive orders, and move up to join in the attack varied greatly between landing teams and ranged from five minutes to two hours.

On the whole, the medical planning for the Peleliu operation proved its worth. Medical companies varied from three to five percent above authorized strength in hospital corps personnel and medical officers. Organic medical units accompanied the 81st Infantry Division to Peleliu. Hospitalization for the soldiers was provided by 1st Marine Division medical companies. There were sufficient ambulances to carry the average daily number of casualties. On occasions when more transportation was required, cargo trucks were used. DUKWs proved invaluable for evacuating patients from inland medical facilities directly to ships.

In less than an hour from the time the first troops landed on Peleliu, casualties were being received aboard APAs from the beaches. The beach and shore party medical sections worked in close coordination. The latter remained on the beaches as aid and evacuation stations. They were consolidated when evacuation was discontinued on White Beach. When evacuation was begun on Purple Beach, a shore party medical section was established on the latter beach for evacuation.

Each Marine combat team had 96 men assigned as stretcher bearers. These personnel had previously received instruction in first aid and actual practice in the handling of litter cases in the staging area. Although this number was not sufficient to handle all litter cases, these men formed a trained nucleus to which additional personnel could be assigned. As far as the 1st Marine Division was concerned, before the operation was concluded, stretcher bearers were detailed from all supporting and garrison units—artillery, aviation, amphibian tractor, construction battalions, special CBs, and Navy communications units.⁴³

On Peleliu there was practically no illness that could be directly attributed to flies or mosquitoes, though there was more than a lingering suspicion that their presence endangered the health of the troops. Mosquitoes were prevalent in the swamps adjacent to and north and northwest of the airfield, but were of the pest variety only. At the time the Marines went ashore on Peleliu,

⁴³ Col Harold O. Deakin ltr to CMC, dtd 10Mar50, in *Peleliu Comment File*.

there were few flies present. Three weeks later the fly population had reached proportions that made strenuous control methods essential. About two weeks after the initial landings, mild cases of gastro-intestinal disease appeared among frontline troops. Gradually the disorder spread to the rear echelon Marines. Even though the exact cause of this outbreak was never definitely established, the superabundance of flies on the island, caused by breeding in bodies, waste food, Japanese dumps, deposits of uncovered human feces, and non-flyproof latrines pointed to the source of the infection.

Maladies peculiar to the tropical climate causing acute discomfort were prickly heat and heat rash. Since water was scarce and dirt prevalent, scratching caused infection which spread rapidly. There were also numerous cases of multiple open sores, about the size of a dime which formed under the arms, around the belt, and on the inner parts of the legs.⁴⁴

Prior to the actual landings, photographic intelligence was inadequate and until the end of August the photographs available were insufficient for beach defense study. Good photographs taken a week before the landing reached the task force while it was en route to the objective, but they were not made available to the troop commanders. Because of inadequate photography, maps were deficient, particularly insofar as the configuration of terrain was concerned. As an official Army Air Forces report was to put it later:

⁴⁴ LtCol Spencer S. Berger ltr to CMC, dtd 19Mar50, in *Peleliu Comment File*.

Whether or not more frequent and more careful photographic coverage of an island prior to the time of attack would reveal appreciably more than we now find is questionable. Certainly the number of suitable targets on the islands which have been located and listed for destruction were very few compared to the total which existed. Many of those which were undiscovered would have been effectively dealt with by the Navy's guns or by aerial bombardment. It is true, however, that photographic coverage, while complete, has been spasmodic. It is possible that had photographs been taken at more frequent intervals some of the defensive work would have been spotted in progress before work trails could have been covered and piles of spoil from the diggings had been dispersed.⁴⁵

The Marines enjoyed certain advantages, however, in evaluating the enemy situation. American troops on Saipan had reaped a windfall with the capture of documents indicating that the total number of enemy troops on Peleliu exceeded 10,000 men.⁴⁶ The close similarity between the estimated figure of between 10,320 and 10,700 Japanese and the actual figure of about 10,900 was so striking that the IIIAC intelligence officer subsequently remarked "that the documents captured on Saipan provided a source of information which may be unparalleled in future operations."⁴⁷

Unlike the campaign at Cape Gloucester, the 1st Marine Division

⁴⁵ Report No. 2, AAF Evaluation Board, Pacific Ocean Areas, (USAF Historical Archives File 138.6-2), p. 6, as cited in official USAF HistDiv comments, dtd 22Jun66, in *Peleliu Comment File*.

⁴⁶ Expeditionary Trps, ThirdFlt, Encl B to Palau Rpt; IIIAC, Encl C to Palau Rpt.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

captured few documents on Peleliu that were of immediate tactical value. Whether the dearth of captured documentary material was due to the fact that the Japanese had holed up in elaborate caves, many of which were sealed shut, or whether the enemy was becoming more security conscious was open to speculation. Nevertheless, a number of maps showing defensive sectors, the location of mine fields, and gun positions were captured. In one instance, the 7th Marines found a sketch showing the number and location of mines on a peninsula still in enemy hands. Subsequently, the same regiment turned in a captured ration statement for Japanese Army and Navy personnel stationed on Peleliu and Ngesebus. Since the document was dated 1 September, it provided excellent information about the strength of various Japanese units on Peleliu, which closely paralleled the intelligence previously obtained from documents seized on Saipan.⁴⁸

Enemy materiel seized was not limited to documentary sources. Capture of the Peleliu airfield, for instance, yielded 130 aircraft, including spare parts and equipment. Even though these aircraft were not operational, an analysis of this materiel provided information of new developments, especially the discovery of a new model of the Type I medium bomber "Betty" and a model of another new medium bomber dubbed "Frances."⁴⁹

American propaganda on Peleliu was generally ineffective because the Japa-

nese maintained a high state of morale throughout the operation. A breakdown of enemy personnel captured on Peleliu up to 20 October showed that of the total of 302 captured, 92 were Japanese, including 7 Army, 12 Navy, and 73 laborers. The remainder of the prisoners was composed of non-Japanese laborers, including one Chinese, one Formosan, 206 Koreans, one prisoner who died before identification could be made, and two others whose physical and mental condition precluded identification.⁵⁰

It was evident that most of the non-Japanese laborers, and in fact, some of the laborers of Japanese nationality, did not share an overpowering sense of loyalty to Japan and its military traditions. Many laborers stated that even though, as a rule, the American leaflets gave a time and place for surrendering, they felt that they could not get there safely and obtained better protection by remaining in their caves. One more reason has been advanced for the enemy's reluctance to surrender:

... the understandable but extreme bitterness of Marines in not wishing to take any prisoners but to kill every Jap sighted was just as much a factor in the prolonged resistance of the defenders as any fanatical, suicidal last ditch stand by the Japanese.⁵¹

That the above is not the isolated speculation of one individual was emphasized in an official report echoing the same sentiment:

The lack of prisoners during the first several days was probably due as much to the bitterness of the fighting as to the ap-

⁴⁸ 1st MarDiv SAR, Phase II, Anx B, p. 9.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁵¹ Capt Clyde L. Bozarth, MC, USN, ltr to CMC, dtd 13Mar50, in *Peleliu Comment File*.

parent reluctance of both troops and unit commanders to effect captures. It is believed that a more serious and sustained attempt to indoctrinate all personnel with the value and importance of taking prisoners would pay increasingly larger dividends as the war progresses.⁵³

In one respect at least, the 1st Marine Division on Peleliu did not encounter the problems faced by other divisions on Guam, Saipan, and subsequently on Okinawa. This was in the field of civil affairs, where prior evacuation of natives from Peleliu by the Japanese proved advantageous to the Americans also. The Marines thus were relieved of the responsibility of controlling and caring for members of a civilian populace whose presence would have constituted a liability far in excess of any assistance they might have been able to render to the invasion force.

Signal communications on Peleliu did not present any undue problems, and the performance of radio and other signal equipment did not differ materially from that of other campaigns. During the first two days of the campaign, radio remained the primary means of communication, and both the SCR-300 and the SCR-610 performed excellently in corps and division nets. Two radio-equipped DUKWs were landed and operated moderately well until moisture affected the equipment and its performance became marginal. An experimental armored amphibian equipped with various types of communications gear was landed at H plus 90 minutes with the advance division message center. It was discovered at that time that the battery charging circuits were inoperative,

and, as a result, no use of this equipment was made until D plus 10.⁵³

One of the innovations in the field of communications on Peleliu was to encourage officers to talk directly over voice radio circuits, since this speeded communications and relieved crowded telephone circuits. Visual communication by blinker lamp was not used during the operation, nor were telegraph or teletype employed. In maintaining radio contact with tanks, frequency modulation equipment proved most rugged, reliable, and flexible. The only defect found in this equipment appeared to be its limited range. It became necessary to set up a relay station for transmissions from northern Peleliu to the vicinity of the airfield. When peaks intervened, the effective range dropped to as low as two miles.⁵⁴

In connection with communications on Peleliu, the activities of the 4th Joint Assault Signal Company are of special interest. Upon arriving at the staging area at Pavuvu, the 10 communications teams, 9 shore fire control parties, and 13 air liaison parties were at once attached to battalions and regiments with which they were to operate. The greatest difficulty was experienced in the control of the communications teams which were attached to each battalion. The teams themselves worked well, although difficulty was experienced in coordinating them since they were not landed as a tactical unit. Air liaison parties and shore fire control parties worked very well, even though in many instances these teams went ashore too

⁵³ *IIIAC OpRpt*, Encl B, p. 2.

⁵³ *1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase II, Anx E, p. 2.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, Anx J, p. 10.

soon on beaches where assault troops were pinned down by fire.⁵⁵

The quantity, quality, and thoroughness of naval gunfire are an extremely important factor in any amphibious assault. This held particularly true for a heavily fortified and strongly defended island like Peleliu. Because this particular phase of the Peleliu operation has since become the object of considerable controversy, a detailed discussion of naval gunfire support during the pre-landing phase appears in order.

The pre-bombardment of Peleliu had a threefold objective: to knock out enemy aircraft and artillery installations; to destroy as many enemy strongpoints as possible and to eliminate all enemy ships, barges, and small craft capable of reinforcing the enemy garrison from the north. To achieve these objectives, fires were scheduled not only against known enemy positions but also against areas that a study of the terrain and a knowledge of Japanese tactics would indicate enemy use for fortified positions, assembly areas, communications centers, or ammunition dumps.

The importance attached by the Navy to the STALEMATE operation was underscored by the personages in attendance, whose presence has been described as follows by a naval historian:

Peleliu was honored by the participation of a large number of flag and general officers. Vice Admiral Wilkinson and Major Generals Julian Smith and William Rupertus were on board Rear Admiral Fort's amphibious command ship *Mount McKinley*. General Geiger was on board *Mount Olympus*, to which Wilkinson

shifted at Eniwetok. Rear Admiral Blandy and General Mueller were in *Fremont*. Rear Admiral Jesse B. Oldendorf in *Louisville* commanded a formidable fire support group of five battleships, five heavy cruisers, three light cruisers, and fourteen destroyers; and they had two more flag officers, Rear Admirals Ainsworth and Kingman, embarked. Rear Admiral Ralph Ofstie commanded between seven and eleven escort carriers to provide combat air and antisubmarine patrol, and Rear Admiral William D. Sample had a carrier division under him. Admiral Halsey dropped in on Peleliu 17 September; in the entire chain of command, only Admiral Nimitz stayed away.⁵⁶

Surely, with such a large number of critical observers present, there was a great opportunity to show what preliminary bombardment could accomplish in support of an amphibious operation. Based on experience in similar operations, the Navy conducted the customary preliminary aerial and naval bombardment before the landing. As early as 6 September, fast carriers of Halsey's Third Fleet took the islands under aerial bombardment. After three days of bombing it was determined that the B-24 attacks had already inflicted serious damage on many of the enemy

⁵⁶ Morison, *Leyte*, p. 34. There appears to be some controversy as to who boarded what ship. According to other sources, Admiral Fort and Generals Geiger and Julian Smith, with the staffs of the higher echelons, were embarked in USS *Mount McKinley*, while General Rupertus and the bulk of the division staff embarked in USS *DuPage*; General O. P. Smith and the remainder of the staff were on the USS *Elmore*. Hough, *Peleliu Monograph*, pp. 21-22. This version is concurred in by the former chief of staff of ILLAC, LtGen Merwin H. Silverthorn (Ret) ltr to Head, HistBr, dtd 26Jun66, in *Peleliu Comment File*.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, Anx E, p. 1.

installations, and the carriers moved off towards the Philippines.

With the arrival of the task force off Peleliu on 12 September, the pre-bombardment of Peleliu began in earnest:

The original plan had called for only two days of preparatory naval bombardment. Geiger objected that this was too little and asked for four. He finally got three for Peleliu and five for Angaur . . . Five old battleships, eight cruisers, and fourteen destroyers, most of them veterans of shore bombardment and under the command of Rear Admiral Jesse B. Oldendorf, USN . . . arrived off Palau on September 12. Oldendorf was handicapped in the execution of his mission both in the facilities he had on hand and in the size of his staff. His flag was an old battleship, not one of the new headquarters ships whose superior communications equipment had been one of the reasons for the increased effectiveness of naval gunfire support in the Marshalls and on Guam. Also he was short on staff personnel. In spite of many previous recommendations to the Bureau of Naval Personnel in Washington he had only a cruiser division staff, consisting of four officers. To add to his difficulties all of these but one were on the sick list during the preliminary bombardment.⁵⁷

The ammunition expenditure in the tactical employment of naval gunfire amounted to 3,490 tons prior to H-Hour and 2,359 tons thereafter.⁵⁸ The naval bombardment obliterated much of the dense vegetation on the ridge immediately north of the airfield, sub-

sequently to become known as Bloody Nose Ridge. What this naval gunfire could not and did not eliminate were the numerous Japanese defenses in caves and underground shelters, which enabled the enemy to remain safely underground until the bombardment lifted.

The Japanese on Peleliu did not at any time disclose their presence prior to the amphibious landing of the Marines. The total absence of Japanese counterbattery fire during the preliminary bombardment and the dense pall of smoke that soon hung over Peleliu like a shroud, combined to embue Admiral Oldendorf with a deceptive sense of optimism. In contacting Admiral Fort on the evening of 14 September, Admiral Oldendorf made the unfortunate remark that he had run out of targets. This statement, followed shortly by a rash prediction by General Rupertus of a short but tough campaign, subsequently cast a pall of disappointment, consternation, and bitterness that has at times tended to obscure the planning, effort, valor, and heroism which far surpassed interservice or interarm quibbling and reproach.

The bitterness of the Marines who had reason to assume that the landing would not be an extremely difficult one is understandable when it became apparent that some of the most important enemy defenses were still functioning during the amphibious assault. Typical of this feeling is the following comment, made long after the guns had become silent, though still filled with passionate reproach:

There was never any question of the importance of the southwestern promon-

⁵⁷ Col Donald M. Weller ltr to Philip A. Crowl, dtd 22Mar50, as quoted in Isely and Crowl, *U. S. Marines and Amphibious War*, p. 402. RAdm Jesse B. Oldendorf ltr to Dir, MarCorpsHist, dtd 25Mar50, in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Oldendorf ltr*.

⁵⁸ *1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase II, Anx K, p. 4.

tory, the unnamed island, the left flank of the 1st Marines and the high ground to the north of the airfield, nor was there any question as to the necessity of knocking out enemy positions in those areas and the provisions for continuous support to be delivered. This fact was impressed upon the staff of RAdm Fort on many occasions.

Preliminary bombardment plans, air and naval gunfire, were made with the above consideration. Before the Advance Force sailed, great emphasis was placed on the necessity of thoroughly covering these areas. In this connection . . . the dispatch sent by Admiral Oldendorf was not only a surprise but was not understood by any of us on the Division Staff in view of the study, and requirements we had submitted, and the plans which had been so carefully prepared and agreed to as essential and necessary for the accomplishment of the Division mission. . . .

What happened on D-Day is a matter of history. . . . I have asked of the unit commanders many times for an explanation of just what happened. No one is certain of anything except that the enemy was not knocked out.⁶⁰

In this connection, Rear Admiral Oldendorf's comments may be of interest, for they reflect the problems and difficulties which beset him at the time:

My Gunfire Support Plan called for all known or suspected enemy strong points to be destroyed. . . . The preliminary bombardment was, I thought at the time, one of the most thorough that could be devised considering the lack of intelligence concerning enemy strong points. The prelanding gunfire support was, I thought, superior to anything which had been put on heretofore. My surprise and chagrin when concealed batteries opened up on the LVTs can be imagined. . . . Under these circumstances, no matter how many shells you fire or their caliber,

you cannot destroy enemy gun emplacements on an island the size of Peleliu, unless the enemy will oblige by disclosing the position of his guns. . . . The best that can be done is to blast away at suspected positions and hope for the best.⁶¹

In commenting on naval gunfire at Peleliu, Rear Admiral George H. Fort deplored a tendency on the part of the Marines to set up the naval gunfire at Guam as the standard and to judge other operations by it. Instead, the "de luxe" bombardment of Guam, which had not been originally planned when the Marianas operation was first plotted, in the long run increased the difficulties of the Peleliu operation. Rear Admiral Fort expressed his views on this subject as follows:

I think it is a grave error to set up the Guam operation as the standard for the future. It is erroneous to lead the Marines or other troops to expect any such support prior to landing. It never happened anywhere else and probably never will again. . . . The original plan was for two days' bombardment at Peleliu which was subsequently increased to three. Whereas this increase permitted somewhat more deliberate bombardment, it did not increase the weight of metal in the slightest. The same amount of ammunition was to have been used in the originally scheduled two days as was subsequently used in three. If Admiral Oldendorf broke off fire before he had used up his allowed ammunition on the grounds that there were no more targets, he was entirely correct. The idea which some people seem to have of just firing at an island is an inexcusable waste of ammunition.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Oldendorf ltr.

⁶⁰ LtCol Lewis J. Fields ltr to CMC, dtd 17Mar50, in *Peleliu Comment File*.

⁶¹ RAdm George H. Fort ltr to BGen Clayton C. Jerome, dtd 20Mar50, in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Fort ltr*.

Many accounts of the Peleliu operation have dwelled so extensively on what was wrong with the prelanding bombardment that little has been said of naval gunfire support after the landings. Of this support in the hours following the landing on Peleliu, the following was noted:

Naval gunfire support, by now an essential feature of amphibious assaults, was very little used on D-Day at Peleliu because of the confused nature of the fighting. Cruisers *Louisville*, *Portland* and *Indianapolis* were idle most of the day. But Admiral Ofstie's eleven escort carriers flew 382 sorties on D-Day in support of the troops, besides making interdiction strikes on the airfield at Babelthuap and bombing enemy ships in Malakal and Koror harbors. No Japanese aircraft appeared in opposition.⁶²

For the remainder of the Peleliu operation, naval gunfire provided close and deep support fire as well as harassing, interdiction, and night illumination fire. The lack of suitable observation points precluded the use of close supporting fires in many instances, so that they were not used as extensively as in other operations. Air spotting for deep supporting fire was used extensively in neutralizing enemy reserves, gun positions, supply and ammunition dumps, and observation and communication points. Air spotting proved to be one of the best and most effective means of fire control.

Harassing fire was used rather extensively. It was employed principally at night and was delivered in areas well clear of the front line. Ships firing night harassing fire also doubled for emergency call fire or illumination. In-

terdiction fire was employed in the areas at the north end of Peleliu and on the nearby island of Ngesebus to prevent enemy reinforcements from being brought up. Star shell illumination was used extensively. It was regulated, as were other fires, so that it would not illuminate friendly units and produce casualties among friendly troops. The rate of fire varied from 1 round per minute to 10 or 15 rounds per hour.⁶³

One lesson that could be learned on Peleliu was that tanks could survive a pre-landing bombardment, and that naval gunfire and air could not prevent hostile tanks from closing on the landing force. "What the enemy achieved with thin-skinned, obsolete tankettes, a potential enemy possessing powerful tanks in great numbers might presumably also accomplish, thus posing a grave potential threat against a landing force."⁶⁴ On the other hand, no two tactical situations are exactly alike. During the Sicily operation, for instance, naval gunners were the major factor in breaking up a tank attack on the beaches near Gela.⁶⁵

The 1st Marine Division did not have a Marine naval gunfire officer, and no officers in the division had been trained for such an assignment. As a result of its experiences on Peleliu, the 1st Marine Division recommended the selection of artillery officers for naval

⁶² 1st MarDiv SAR, Phase II, Anx K, p. 6.

⁶⁴ Stuart ltr.

⁶⁵ For a detailed account of this incident, see Samuel Eliot Morison, *Sicily-Salerno-Anzio (January 1943-June 1944)—History of United States Naval Operations in World War II*, v. IX, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1962), pp. 103-104.

⁶² Morison, *Leyte*, p. 39.

gunfire training. Another recommendation was the addition of a division naval liaison officer with a team, and three regimental naval gunfire liaison teams to the JASCO. Naval gunfire was stopped during practically every air strike. The 1st Marine Division felt that this practice should be the exception rather than the general rule, if in the opinion of the commanding officer such fire did not endanger friendly aircraft.⁶⁶

Aside from a temporary halt to the unloading of supplies during periods of stormy weather, the Peleliu operation was not beset by any major supply difficulties. The pioneer battalion, using one company of engineers, formed the framework for the division shore party. The commanding officer of the pioneer battalion was the division shore party commander. The shore party was responsible for handling supplies on and behind the beach and for processing casualties recovered from division units.

Initially, the operation of the shore party was decentralized, *i.e.* a detachment of the regimental shore party went in with each assault battalion. When the infantry regimental headquarters landed, the regimental shore party commander took over and consolidated battalion shore party operations for the regimental beach. In turn, the division shore party commander took over shore party operations on all beaches and determined what beaches were to continue as supply beaches. Operations of the shore party were closely coordinated with those of the naval beach parties. By the time that all assault troops, equipment, and supplies had gone

ashore, the 16th Field Depot, a supply agency of the Island Command, took over the supply dumps. Subsequently, the field depot also supplied those components of the 81st Infantry Division operating on Peleliu.

The distribution and forwarding of supplies caused little difficulty, because distances were extremely short and amphibian tractors and DUKWs, in many instances, were able to move directly from the water to regimental dumps. During the last days of September, bad weather caused unloading difficulties. When the ration level reached four days' supply, the troops were put on two meals per day, and MAG-11 flew in 42,000 Ten-in-One Rations.⁶⁷ The rugged ground in which the troops had to operate caused excessive wear and tear on clothing. When organizational supplies became exhausted, a total of 1,000 suits of utilities, 5,000 pairs of socks, and 1,000 pairs of shoes were flown in from Guam.⁶⁸

The attachment of a field depot unit to the 1st Marine Division was an innovation that worked extremely well. As expressed by the Commanding Officer, 1st Service Battalion:

. . . this subjected the depot to the direct orders of the Division Commander and resulted in excellent assistance and cooperation without the necessity of dealing with them through a Corps Headquarters. All the difference between ordering and asking.⁶⁹

All air strikes immediately preceding D-Day and for 13 days thereafter were

⁶⁷ Smith, *Narrative*, p. 77.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* p. 78.

⁶⁹ Col John Kaluf ltr to CMC, datd 7Mar50, in *Peleliu Comment File*.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

flown by Navy pilots from fast and escort carriers. The 1st Marine Division was able to make certain recommendations and requests for air strikes against specific and important targets to Commander Support Air after the arrival of the Western Attack Force in the staging area. These requests and recommendations were followed as closely as possible within the limitations of the already existent air plan. This was the only opportunity offered the division to participate in or make recommendations regarding planning for air support.⁷⁰

As a result of planned missions and call missions requested by battalion, regimental, and division air teams, over 300 missions were flown from D-Day through 28 September. During this period of time, carrier-based aircraft dropped 620 tons of bombs of all types including napalm. After D plus 13 it was felt that carrier-based air could no longer be profitably employed, so naval air support was secured at the end of 28 September.⁷¹

The efficiency of naval air support was readily apparent while fighting was in progress in the level terrain on the southern portion of Peleliu, where it was relatively easy to spot targets and mark and distinguish front lines. When the fighting moved into the rugged hills on the northern half of the island, the effectiveness of air support diminished greatly. This decrease was due to the

difficulty in marking friendly and enemy terrain, inaccuracy of available maps, and the control of all missions directly from the headquarters ship. In no instance was any battalion air liaison party permitted to control or direct missions, even though by reason of its forward location, the party was in possession of the latest information. On the basis of these experiences, the 1st Marine Division recommended that in subsequent operations, the battalion and regimental air liaison teams be allowed to control aircraft directly from the ground. The advantage of this was obvious, since the man on the spot would be able to coach the strike on the target better than an air control officer on board the headquarters ship.⁷²

In contrast with the more effective aerial bombing, the strafing missions carried out by support air were considered to have little or no value. Naval aircraft began and completed strafing runs at too high an altitude: they seldom made pullouts under 1,800 feet.⁷³

The ineffectiveness of such procedure was particularly apparent during the pre-landing attacks on the Peleliu beaches and subsequent strafing runs in the hills. On the basis of this experience, the 1st Marine Division felt that at most, such strafing could result in keeping the enemy pinned down for the duration of the strafing run.

The employment of VMF-114 on Peleliu on and after 28 September put an end to the deficiencies of the avail-

⁷⁰ According to Navy sources, the selection of Pavuvu as a camp for the 1st Marine Division was an important factor in impeding close joint planning for air support. The stepped-up time schedule was also involved. *Eller ltr.*

⁷¹ *1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase II, Anx L, p. 1.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁷³ Some Navy squadrons, such as VC-21 based on Marcus Island, reported pullouts from strafing runs ranging from 300 and 1,000 feet. See *Eller ltr.*

able air support. The close support given by the Corsairs flown by Marine aviators proved extremely effective during the landing on Ngesebus. The effectiveness of subsequent bombing missions against the Umurbrogol Pocket was limited only by the difficult terrain and the relative invulnerability of underground Japanese defenses to aerial attack. General Rupertus, often reticent and sparing in praise, found the close air support furnished by VMF-114 to be "executed in a manner leaving little to be desired."⁷⁴

The Peleliu operation was unique in that it featured the first Marine aviation support of a Marine landing since Bougainville. It was also the first time since Guadalcanal that the 1st Marine Division had received close air support by Marines. Peleliu, in addition, had the distinction of featuring the very first Marine air support of a Marine amphibious operation in the Central Pacific.

Results of the napalm strikes carried out during the Peleliu operation were generally disappointing, probably because of an erroneous concept about the proper employment of this weapon. This lack of understanding of the capabilities and limitations of napalm is best illustrated by the following account:

A few days before D-Day, while we were at sea, our regimental intelligence officer spoke at a conference of all officers of BLT 1/7. We had been told that a certain aircraft carrier, loaded with napalm bombs, was to plaster the southwestern peninsula (our battalion objective) to burn out the Japs with this sticky, inflammable substance. But until the date of this conference, the report had come in that the fuses for these bombs had

not arrived. At the conference, however, we were told that the fuses had finally arrived, had been delivered to the carrier by air, and at that very moment were being affixed to these wondrous bombs. The Intelligence Officer announced with some excitement and eloquence, and with sincere belief in what he was saying, that these remarkable bombs, even though they may not splatter each Jap, gave such intense, prolonged heat that they would literally suffocate any holed-up Jap because of their huge appetite for oxygen. Furthermore, this peninsula would be denuded of vegetation. Now, what infantryman would not relish an objective stripped of concealing vegetation and devoid of live enemy soldiers? Incredible as it may sound now, it was generally believed to be quite truthful. We had not seen these bombs. Napalm was a war wonder. And there is the human tendency to enfold any and all optimism at a time like this. This information . . . was quickly disseminated to the troops and was received with cheers.⁷⁵

The capture of Peleliu and Angaur was very costly in American lives. At the end of the Peleliu operation the 1st Marine Division (Reinforced) listed its casualties sustained on Peleliu as 1,121 officers and men killed in action, 5,142 wounded in action, and 73 missing in action.⁷⁶ For the period of 23 September to 27 November 1944, the 81st Infantry Division listed its casualties on Peleliu as 277 killed in action or dead of wounds and 1,008 wounded or injured in action.⁷⁷ Casualties of the 81st Infantry Division on Angaur for the period of 17 September-30 October 1944, were 260 killed or died of wounds and 1,354 wounded or injured in action.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Worden ltr.

⁷⁶ 1st MarDiv SAR, Phase II, Anx G, p. 2.

⁷⁷ 81st InfDiv OpRpt, Peleliu, Anx F, p. 109.

⁷⁸ 81st InfDiv OpRpt, Angaur, Anx P, p. 112.

⁷⁴ Quoted in Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*, p. 257.

Subsequent tallies show certain revisions and deviations from the earlier findings. A later figure for Marine casualties on Peleliu lists 1,252 as dead (killed in action, died of wounds, and missing presumed dead) and 5,274 wounded.⁷⁹ In a later compilation, casualties of the 81st Infantry Division on Peleliu, Angaur, and the smaller islands off Peleliu totalled 542 killed and 2,736 wounded or injured in action.⁸⁰ The subsequent revisions of figures contained in the earlier official after-action reports are the result of additional information not included in earlier reports. This would include a number of wounded who subsequently died of wounds sustained in the operation.⁸¹

The exact number of Japanese killed on Peleliu will presumably never be known, though a reasonably close figure can be obtained through the process of deduction. Even prior to the landings on Peleliu, Japanese strength on that island had been estimated at between 10,320 and 10,700. If the 302 Japanese captured are deducted from a median of 10,500, it follows that at least 10,200 of the enemy must have died on the island, even when allowance is made for a small number that may have escaped to Japanese-held islands to the north. Since an additional 600 Japanese went ashore on Peleliu while operations there

were in progress, a total of 10,900 could be considered a reasonably conservative figure, which is generally supported elsewhere.⁸²

PELELIU IN RETROSPECT⁸³

More than two decades have passed since the 1st Marine Division assaulted Peleliu. From those that had participated in the campaign, there has been no lack of superlatives in its description. A former Commandant of the Marine Corps has called it "... one of the least publicized and most difficult campaigns of World War II."⁸⁴ The official U.S. Army history calls the Palaus operation "... one of the bloodiest battles of the war."⁸⁵ In commenting on the Peleliu campaign, Admiral Fort expressed himself as follows:

⁸² The Army version of the Peleliu Operation lists over 11,000 Japanese killed on Peleliu, and 2,600 more on Angaur and the smaller islands off Peleliu. Smith, *Approach to the Philippines*, p. 572. Morison, in *Leyte*, p. 46, cites the same total of 13,600 Japanese killed on Peleliu and vicinity. Speaking of Peleliu Island alone, Isely and Crowl estimate a total of 10,695 enemy dead up to 20 October 1944, in *U. S. Marines and Amphibious War*, p. 411. In the light of the documentary material available and other evidence, the figure of 7,000 personnel on Peleliu (Army and Navy combined) advanced by General Inoue in a postwar interview appears far too low to be credible. Inoue interview in *Worden ltr.*

⁸³ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: Smith, *Narrative*; Vandegrift and Asprey, *Once A Marine*; Cra-ven and Cate, *The Pacific*; Isely and Crowl, *U. S. Marines and Amphibious War*; Halsey and Bryan, *Admiral Halsey's Story*; Morison, *Leyte*; Smith, *Approach to the Philippines*.

⁸⁴ Vandegrift and Asprey, *Once A Marine*, p. 274.

⁸⁵ Smith, *Approach to the Philippines*, p. 573.

⁷⁹ Hough, *Assault on Peleliu*, p. 183.

⁸⁰ Smith, *Approach to the Philippines*, p. 573.

⁸¹ Differences in casualty reporting and accounting systems have resulted in a further variance. Based on the most recent official Marine Corps statistics available at the time of this writing, 1,794 Americans died on Peleliu and adjacent islands during the Peleliu Campaign and approximately 7,800 were wounded or injured in action.

I think those who have taken the trouble to investigate are in general agreement that the capture of Peleliu was the most difficult amphibious operation in the Pacific War. . . . I believe that the Palaus operation has been underestimated. Were it not for the untimely deaths of Generals Geiger and Rupertus so soon afterwards, I feel sure that they would have helped to clarify the situation. Iwo Jima was done by the so-called Central Pacific "First Team" and received widespread publicity and acclaim. As General Geiger once said, "The only difference between Iwo Jima and Peleliu was that at Iwo Jima there were twice as many Japs on an island twice as large, and they had three Marine Divisions to take it while we had one Marine Division to take Peleliu."⁸⁸

The above statement, made by the commander in direct tactical control at Peleliu and Angaur, bears closer scrutiny. It not only lends emphasis to what others have said about the severity of the fighting on Peleliu, but also adds a new note with respect to the numerical adequacy of the force committed. General Geiger's comment, as quoted by Admiral Fort, leaves little doubt that he was referring to a failure to provide an adequate reserve for the 1st Marine Division. Of three regiments employed to assault Peleliu, only one battalion remained in division and another in regimental reserve. Had the 81st Infantry Division been committed on Peleliu when it became apparent that Japanese resistance there did not permit the speedy conquest of the island, the landing on Angaur could have been postponed until completion of operations on Peleliu. This conclusion is supported by General Inoue, who subsequently stated ". . . it

was estimated that at least three American divisions would land on either the southern or the eastern beaches. . . ."⁸⁷

In view of the heavy American casualties on Peleliu, opinion has been divided whether the gains derived from the capture of the island were worth the heavy cost in American lives. Comments from historians and military leaders alike question whether the results were worth the effort. In the words of one historian:

. . . doubts are easily raised in the light of the fact that eleventh-hour changes in plans for subsequent operations—notably the invasion of the Philippines—made it impossible to fit the Palaus into the operational role originally planned for them. . . . Nevertheless, with the information available to them in the summer and early fall of 1944, Admiral Nimitz, General MacArthur, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff all believed that only by securing the Palaus could the Allies dominate Japanese bases in the western Pacific and insure the safety of forces moving toward the Philippines.⁸⁹

Among the military leaders who felt strongly that Peleliu should not have been invaded, Admiral Halsey perhaps is best qualified to voice his opinion, for it was he who opposed the operation from the very outset. In commenting on Peleliu, Admiral Halsey had this to say:

I had been weighing this operation ever since it had been broached to me, early in May, at a conference with King and Nimitz in San Francisco, and the more I weighed it, the less I liked it. Ulithi had a useful anchorage, but I saw no need for any of the other islands. Yap's only value was as a minor staging

⁸⁸ Fort ltr.

⁸⁷ Inoue Interrogation.

⁸⁹ Smith, *Approach to the Philippines*, pp. 573-575.

point for aircraft. The Palaus threatened the route between New Guinea and the Philippines, but although they also offered an anchorage—Kossol Roads—and several sites for airfields, I felt that they would have to be bought at a prohibitive price in casualties. In short, I feared another Tarawa—and I was right.⁸⁹

By far the most outspoken comment comes from another naval officer who was deeply involved in the Peleliu Operation. In reviewing the campaign he forthrightly came to the conclusion that:

... if military leaders (including naval) were gifted with the same accuracy of foresight that they are with hindsight, undoubtedly the assault and capture of the Palaus would never have been attempted.⁹⁰

On the surface, the above comments carry considerable weight, the more so if it is considered that the airfields on Peleliu and Angaur, the primary objectives of the assault, ultimately played only a minor part in the liberation of the Philippines. The airfield on Angaur was not ready for use by bombers until 21 October, the day after American forces had landed on Leyte, and it was 17 November before the first bomber mission was flown against a target in the Philippines from a field in the Palaus.⁹¹

What, then, were the advantages, if any, that accrued to the United States through the capture of Peleliu and Angaur? First, the seizure of these islands prevented their use as bases by

enemy aircraft and submarines. By late November, Angaur-based bombers rendered vital support to American forces on Luzon. Beyond that, some 43,000 Japanese were effectively neutralized in the northern Palau islands, where they remained until their unconditional surrender at the end of the war, of no more use to the Empire or the beleaguered Japanese forces in the Philippines than if they had been stationed at the North Pole. Ulithi Atoll in American hands provided an excellent fleet anchorage and assumed major importance during subsequent operations in the Pacific Theater, particularly as a staging area for forces destined for Okinawa.

In retrospect, it appears idle conjecture whether an invasion of the Philippines could have been successful had there been no invasion of the Palau Islands. Military planning is based on a sound appraisal of strategic and tactical factors. It is a logical process of reasoning by which a commander considers all the circumstances affecting the military situation and arrives at a decision which determines the course of action he should take to accomplish his mission. On the basis of the information available to the planners of STALEMATE II during the spring and summer of 1944, the situation called for an operation against Peleliu, Angaur, and adjacent islands. Changes in the basic plan were instituted as necessary to conform to changes in the overall situation.

Peleliu vindicated the amphibious doctrines developed by the Marine Corps in many years of careful study and analysis. The operation proved once again that an amphibious assault on a

⁸⁹ Halsey and Bryan, *Admiral Halsey's Story*, pp. 194-195.

⁹⁰ Oldendorf *ltr.*

⁹¹ Craven and Cate, *The Pacific*, p. 372.

heavily fortified island was feasible. In a way it closely resembled previous landings in the Gilberts and Marshalls and gave a preview of things to come on Iwo Jima and Okinawa. At least one source has commented that "... the most valuable contribution to victory of this costly operation was to prepare the Army and Marine Corps for what they would experience at Okinawa."⁹²

The operation against Peleliu had one more similarity with the Battle of Tarawa. At the conclusion of both campaigns, the Marine Corps received considerable criticism because of the high number of casualties. The truth applying to the cost of such operations has been set forth so aptly by a former Commandant of the Marine Corps that his reply to similar criticism after Tarawa bears repeating in this context:

... A landing attack is recognized by all military experts as being the most difficult and costly of all forms of attack. Losses at Tarawa were heavy, and losses will be heavy in future attacks of this nature. ...

... In the case of a heavily defended small island such as Tarawa ... the defender can concentrate his forces against any landing attempt. ... The attacker

attempts to "soften" resistance by naval gunfire and aerial bombardment. Where the defenses are very strongly constructed, as at Tarawa, the gunfire and aerial bombardment have only partial effect. Many of the hostile installations will remain operative and fire from them must be faced.

No one regrets the losses in such an attack more than does the Marine Corps itself. No one realizes more than does the Marine Corps that there is no royal road to Tokyo. We must steel our people to the same realization.⁹³

In the overall picture of a global conflict, Peleliu was merely a stepping stone towards the ultimate objective, a battle not slated for fame in the outside world, yet an event that left its permanent mark on the men who fought it. In conclusion, it seems fitting to quote an echo from the past; words uttered long ago in a different war, and on another battlefield, yet singularly appropriate in this context. Let it be said of the once cruel and inhospitable soil of Peleliu that "... the brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add and detract. ..."

⁹³ Statement by General Alexander A. Vandegrift to Senator Walsh, 15Dec44, as quoted in Vandegrift and Asprey, *Once a Marine*, pp. 235-236.

⁹² Morison, *Leyte*, p. 47.

PART IV

Marines in the Philippines

Background and Planning ¹

Even though relatively few Marines participated in the liberation of the Philippines, the support they furnished and the services they performed were out of proportion to their small numbers. Marine artillerymen under the command of Brigadier General Thomas E. Bourke supported Army troops on Leyte; Marine pilots commanded by Colonel Clayton C. Jerome bombed and strafed assigned targets and flew fighter missions throughout the campaign, under the overall direction of General MacArthur's air commander, Lieutenant General George C. Kenney. Even more important were the accomplishments of the pilots who developed, crystallized, and refined the doctrine and techniques for the close air support of ground troops. On Leyte, Luzon, Mindanao, and

other islands, Marine pilots convinced skeptical Army ground commanders that aviation was capable of rendering valuable and effective support to the frontline troops. These pilots proved their worth by assisting in the capture of objectives and helping to meet the operational timetable. It was here, in the rain, mud, and jungle of the Philippines, that Marine aviation put the new doctrine of close air support to the test.

No individual can be more closely identified with the liberation of the Philippines than General Douglas MacArthur. During the darkest days of the war the general had pledged his return to the Philippines. From the time that General MacArthur left Corregidor in 1942 to take over the new Allied command formed in Australia, the liberation of the Philippines dominated his thoughts. Only a short time after establishing General Headquarters, Southwest Pacific Area (SWPA), in Brisbane the general initiated planning for that return. More than two years were to pass before these plans were fulfilled.

During this period of time, the command setup in the Pacific Theater underwent several changes. As early as the Guadalcanal campaign, General MacArthur had wielded strategic control over most of the Solomons. Inasmuch as the SWPA commander at the time was preoccupied with operations in eastern New Guinea, Admiral Halsey

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: Maj Charles W. Boggs, Jr., *Marine Aviation in the Philippines* (Washington: HistDiv, HQMC, 1951), hereafter Boggs, *Marines in the Philippines*; Isely and Crowl, *U. S. Marines and Amphibious War*; *The War Reports of General of the Army George C. Marshall, General of the Army Henry H. Arnold, and Fleet Admiral Ernest J. King* (Philadelphia and New York: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1947), hereafter *War Reports* with appropriate originator; USSBS, *Pacific Campaigns*; Morison, *Leyte*. Where location citations for documentary sources for this part are missing, the material is in the files of the Reference Branch, Historical Division, HQMC.

was given control over the entire Solomons chain in addition to the operational command he already exercised at Guadalcanal.²

Initially, the JCS viewed the importance of liberating the Philippines with skepticism. A compromise between the JCS and General MacArthur resulted in a two-pronged campaign in the Pacific during 1943 and 1944. Admiral Nimitz' forces in the Central Pacific received priority in their drive through the Marshalls, the Marianas, and the Carolines while General MacArthur's forces moved northward along the New Guinea coast.

A JCS directive of 12 March 1944³ guided operations in the Pacific Theater for the remainder of the year. As it became apparent that the Japanese power in the Pacific was waning and the two-pronged advance continued, the Joint Chiefs decided that the entire Pacific timetable should be advanced. This revision was based on a sound premise. The campaign in the Marshalls, in February 1944, had brought speedy results. Carrier strikes, in mid-February 1944, against the fortress of Truk proved that Japanese air and naval strength was far weaker than had been assumed. In the end, General MacArthur had been able to advance the target date for the Admiralties operation by a full month.

The 12 March directive was of crucial importance to General MacArthur.

² JCS 238/5D, 28Mar43 had placed operations in the Solomons under Halsey's direct control subject to MacArthur's "general directions," as cited in Boggs, *Marines in the Philippines*, p. 1.

³ JCS 713/4, 12Mar44. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

Even though it fell short of his expectations by not giving him full priority for his return to the Philippines, the directive did authorize the capture of supporting bases and provided for the movement of MacArthur's forces into Mindanao, the southernmost of the Philippine islands. General MacArthur's air commander, General Kenney, was "dumbfounded" to learn that the Joint Chiefs seemed to attach more importance to Nimitz' Central Pacific drive than to any other campaign in the Pacific Theater.⁴ Despite the limitations imposed on further operations in the Southwest Pacific by this change in strategy, the SWPA staff continued to plan for the most ambitious action possible under the circumstances.

In late March 1944, Admiral Nimitz visited General MacArthur in Brisbane for a planning conference. The immediate subject under discussion was the Hollandia operation, though it was inevitable that the two military leaders would also bring up the invasion of the Philippines.⁵ As a result of this conference, MacArthur and Nimitz set up, subject to JCS approval, an operations schedule which called for SWPA forces to land on Mindanao on 15 November 1944.

The Joint Chiefs in March 1944 did not make any provisions for operations in the Philippines following the invasion of Mindanao. Strategy in the Pacific for 1944 called for SWPA forces to move gradually northwest along the New Guinea coast, occupy the islands northwest of the Vogelkop Peninsula,

⁴ Kenney, *Reports*.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 377.

and seize a foothold on Mindanao. American forces in the Central Pacific were to advance towards Japan by way of the Marianas and westward towards the Philippines by way of the Palaus.⁶

While MacArthur's and Nimitz' forces were drafting plans to implement the 12 March directive, the Joint Chiefs conducted a complete reappraisal of the situation in the Pacific and concluded that operations there could be further accelerated. As a result of these deliberations, the Joint Chiefs sent American commanders in the Pacific three alternate proposals for consideration and comment. One of these was revolutionary in that it suggested bypassing the Philippines in favor of Formosa. The other two dealt with advancing target dates and bypassing presently selected objectives. Neither MacArthur nor Nimitz favored the new proposals, and both commanders insisted that the operations as proposed by MacArthur in RENO V were sound.⁷ Nimitz considered it important to take reasonable shortcuts and exploit favorable situations as they arose. He felt that complete control over sea and air was absolutely essential in major assault operations. Naval superiority was assured, but an invasion of Formosa could succeed only if Japanese airfields on Luzon were first neutralized by land-based air-

craft. CinCPac felt that aircraft carriers should not be used to support prolonged operations ashore but should be utilized to carry out strategic missions.⁸

General MacArthur strongly opposed any direct operations against Japan unless air bases were first secured on Luzon. Admiral King, on the other hand, insisted that Formosa should be seized before the Japanese had a chance to reinforce it. In the end General MacArthur won his point, but not until the President had intervened. A new operations schedule called for Southwest Pacific forces to occupy Morotai on 15 September, followed by the invasion of Mindanao on 20 December. Once these two objectives had been secured, the forces of the Southwest Pacific and Central Pacific commands would jointly assault either Luzon or Formosa and Amoy off the China coast.

On 15 June 1944 General MacArthur, as Supreme Commander, Southwest Pacific Area, reassumed control of the area west of 159 degrees East Longitude and south of the Equator. This reacquisition included most of the Solomon Islands west of Guadalcanal. Admiral Halsey relinquished the title of Commander, South Pacific (ComSoPac) to Vice Admiral John H. Newton and returned to sea as Commander, Third Fleet. Due to this change in boundaries, MacArthur regained not only the area he had previously controlled but all units located there.

⁶ For a detailed account of the roles of Admirals Nimitz and Halsey and Generals MacArthur and Sutherland in altering these plans, see Morison, *Leyte*, pp. 13-15.

⁷ The RENO plans provided for the approach to and recapture of the Philippines. They had originated within General MacArthur's SWPA headquarters.

⁸ USSBS, Military Analysis Division, *Employment of Forces Under the Southwest Pacific Command* (Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1946), p. 36.

TARGET: PHILIPPINES^o

The Philippines consist of more than 7,000 islands of varying size with a land area of roughly 115,000 square miles. Located only 500 miles off the mainland of Asia, the Philippines occupy a strategic position in the Pacific in relation to southeast Asia, China, and Japan. The islands extend from the vicinity of Formosa in the north to Borneo and Celebes in the south, a distance of 1,150 miles. Astride the trade routes from Japan and China to southeast Asia and the former East Indies, now known as Indonesia, the islands are centrally located within 700 miles of Formosa and Hong Kong and 1,500 miles from Singapore; only 1,800 miles separate Tokyo from Manila, the capital of the Philippines.

Among the islands within the archipelago, Luzon ranks foremost in size and population. Next in size is Mindanao, followed by a large group of islands in the center of the archipelago commonly known as the Visayas, consisting of Samar, Panay, Cebu, Leyte, Negros, and a number of unnamed smaller islands. (See Map 16).

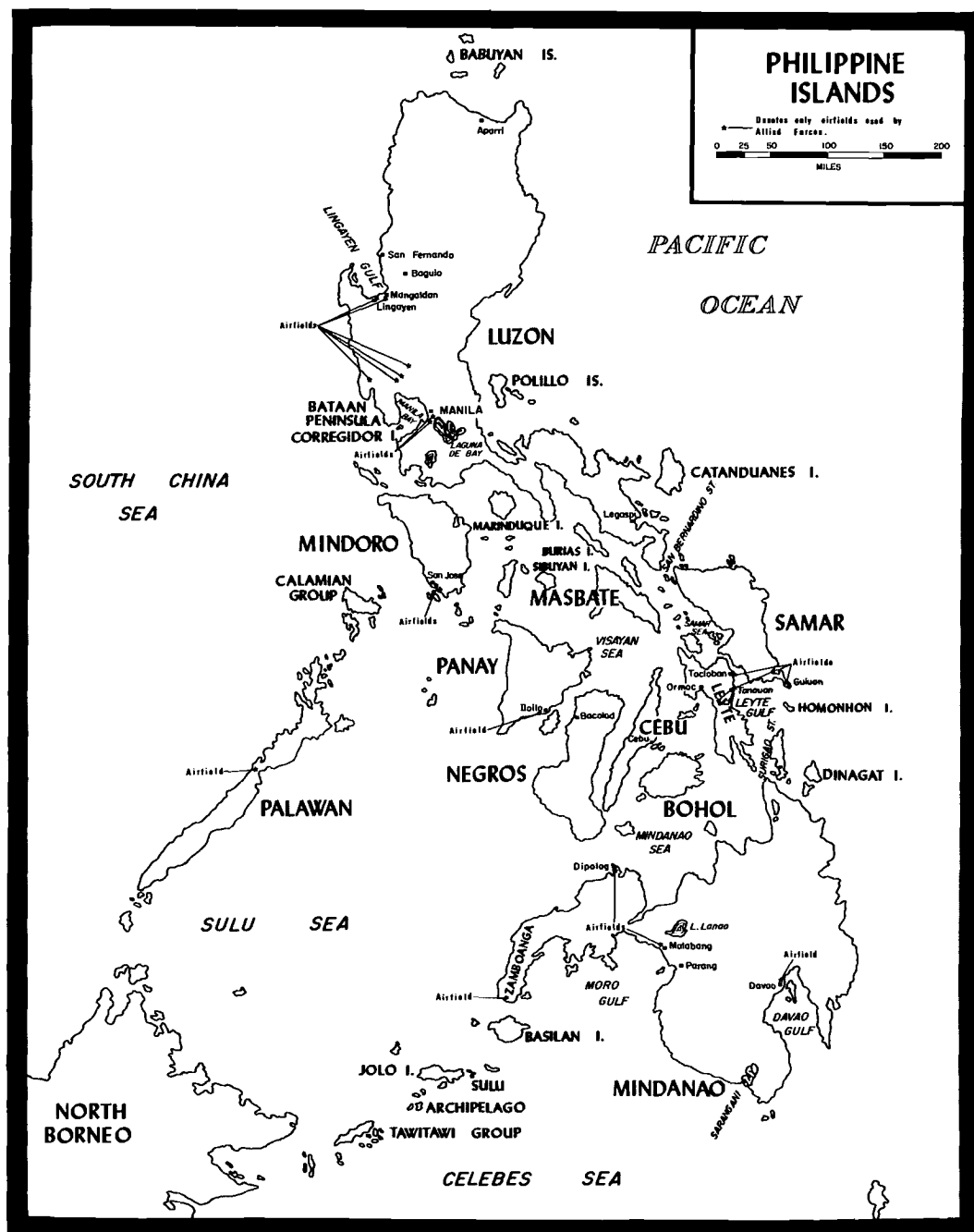
A tropical climate prevails throughout the Philippines, with alternating wet and dry seasons, though these are

not so pronounced on Mindanao and southern Luzon as in other areas of the archipelago. Monsoon winds hit the islands from the southwest between June and September; northeasterly winds prevail from October through April. Mountains with elevations up to 10,000 feet are common in the Philippines; these ranges are often surrounded by narrow coastal plains culminating in sand beaches at the shoreline.

In 1941 the population of the Philippines numbered 17,000,000. Manila had 684,000 inhabitants and was the largest city in the archipelago. The people of the Philippines are predominantly of Malayan origin, though about 30,000 Japanese and 117,000 Chinese also resided in the islands. A peculiar language problem exists throughout the archipelago in that no less than 65 dialects are spoken there, and even though certain similarities exist, natives from different parts of the Philippines frequently find it difficult to communicate with each other.

Spain had gained a foothold on the islands in 1565, when Spaniards established their first permanent settlement in the Philippines on Cebu. Spanish possession of the archipelago continued until 1898, when the United States wrested the islands from Spain. As a result of lengthy foreign domination, a curious mixture of Oriental and Occidental cultures blended, resulting in the adoption of Islamic religion and Moslem customs in the south; Christianity and European culture were predominant in the remainder of the islands. When the United States gained possession of the Philippines, a small percentage of the population spoke Spanish. By the outbreak of World War II, it was

^o Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: Louis Morton, *The Fall of the Philippines—The War in the Pacific—U. S. Army in World War II* (Washington: OCMH, DA, 1953), hereafter Morton, *Fall of the Philippines*; LtCol Frank O. Hough, Maj Verle E. Ludwig, and Henry I. Shaw, Jr., *Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal—History of U. S. Marine Corps Operations in World War II*, v. I (Washington: HistBr, G-3 Div, HQMC, 1958), hereafter Hough, Ludwig, and Shaw, *Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal*.



Map 16

E.L. Wilson

estimated that about one quarter of the population spoke English.

The Philippines were predominantly devoted to agriculture; principal crops were rice, sugar, corn, hemp, and tobacco. Mining for gold, silver, and other metals was carried on in mountain areas but never achieved major importance before the outbreak of the war.

The dispersal of the islands over a large area and the resulting decentralization reduced the need for roads and railroads; inter-island commerce depended primarily on coastal shipping. The only exception to the sparse rail and road net was Luzon, where routes of communication were somewhat more adequate to support military operations. Prior to World War II there were only 50,000 motor vehicles in the Philippines. Principal towns and cities in the archipelago are linked by telephone, telegraph, and radio. Transcontinental telephone and telegraph lines radiate from Manila to provide communications with the remainder of the globe.

Manila owed its importance as capital of the Philippines to its proximity to Manila Bay, one of the best natural harbors in the Far East. Several small islands at the approach to the bay split it into two channels. The largest and most strategically located island is Corregidor, whose defense in World War II was to become a classic of heroic efforts.

Following the acquisition of the Philippines and the pacification of the islands, the United States maintained a permanent garrison in the archipelago. This force numbered about 10,000 men in the mid-thirties, when a Commonwealth Government was established. Up to this time the defense of the Philippines had been a purely American re-

sponsibility. Even though the 10,000-man force was a U.S. Army unit, half of the garrison consisted of Filipinos. Except for this force and a Philippine Constabulary organized at the turn of the century, the Filipinos did not have any military tradition that could serve as a basis for a national army.

During the summer of 1935, General Douglas MacArthur, then Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army, became military advisor to the new Philippine government at the request of the first President of the Philippines, Manuel L. Quezon. General MacArthur's mission was to establish a national army to consist of 10,000 regulars and a reserve of 400,000. Since these figures were to be reached in 1946, at the time that the Philippines were to gain independence, progress in setting up the Army was slow. When war suddenly came to the archipelago, the combined American and Filipino forces were unable to stem the determined Japanese onslaught; the fall of the islands became inevitable despite the solidarity and heroism of Americans and Filipinos fighting side by side. As the fortunes of war changed and Japanese power in the Pacific receded, the Philippines once again figured prominently as another milestone on the long, hard road to Tokyo in Allied planning for the conquest of Japan.

ENEMY SITUATION, DISPOSITION, AND PLANS¹⁰

By the end of June 1944, the Japanese military situation had greatly deterio-

¹⁰ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: USSBS, *Pacific Campaigns*; Military History Section, FEC, Japanese Monograph No. 50, Central Pacific Air Operations Record, 1953, (OCMH), here-

rated. Serious Allied interference with Japanese sea commerce, and piercing of the outer circle of the defenses ringing Japan had underscored the seriousness of the situation. Far from slackening, Allied operations in the Pacific were still gaining momentum, and Japan was faced with the threat of becoming separated from those islands in the South and Southwestern Pacific that constituted a major source of oil. According to Admiral Soemu Toyoda, Commander in Chief of the Japanese *Combined Fleet*:

... the biggest cause of fall in production, especially in aircraft and air material, was the effect of your bombing on the plants—factories—in Japan proper; but as regards the effects on our war strength on the whole, I think the greatest effect was felt after all by the lack of ships and consequent inability to bring material from the south.¹¹

United States control of the Central Pacific forced the Japanese to establish a line of defense extending from Japan proper through the Ryukyu Islands, Formosa, the Philippines, and finally to Timor, Java, and Sumatra. Since the Japanese expected the decisive battles of the war to be fought near the Japanese homeland, *Imperial Japanese Headquarters* initiated four contingency plans in anticipation of decisive operations. These plans, designated *Sho* or

Sho-Go Operations,¹² visualized four possible Allied operations during the summer and autumn of 1944. *Sho-1* envisioned a decisive battle in the Philippine Islands by the end of August; *Sho-2*, a decisive campaign in the Formosa area and Ryukyus at about the same time; *Sho-3* and 4, decisive battles in various parts of Japan proper by late October.

Since *Sho-1* and -2 were considered the most imminent, the Japanese gave full priority to strengthening their defenses in these areas. The Army and Navy agreed that an all-out land defense in the Philippines would be made only if Luzon was invaded. In the event of an American invasion of the Central or Southern Philippines, only air and naval forces would seek decisive action.

The defense of the Philippines from American attack received priority in the minds of the Japanese high command. Reinforcements were dispatched to the northern part of the archipelago by the Japanese Army, which harbored a distrust of the capabilities of the Navy in stemming the American tide of victory. Once the Americans had committed themselves to a specific objective in the Philippines, a mobile counterlanding force was to throw back or at least delay the invader.

By summer of 1944, the Japanese Fleet was hopelessly outnumbered and outclassed, yet ready to fight wherever American forces were landing. The Japanese were fully aware that land-based forces in the Philippines did not stand a chance at success unless they were backed up by the *Combined Fleet*. For

after *Japanese CenPac Air Ops Rec*; James A. Field, Jr., *The Japanese at Leyte Gulf* (Princeton and London: Princeton University Press, 1947), hereafter Field, *Japanese at Leyte*.

¹¹ USSBS, NavAnalysisDiv, *Interrogation of Japanese Officials*, 2 vols. (Washington: GPO 1946), Interrogation No. 378, Adm Soemu Toyoda, IJN, II, p. 313, hereafter *Toyoda Interrogation*.

¹² The Japanese word "*Sho-Go*" stands for "Conquest" or "Victory Operation."

this reason, there was no choice but to gamble the entire fleet. In the words of Admiral Toyoda:

If things went well we might obtain unexpectedly good results; but if the worst should happen, there was a chance that we would lose the entire fleet; but I felt that that chance had to be taken... There would be no sense in saving the fleet at the expense of the loss of the Philippines.¹³

During the late summer of 1944, the *Fourteenth Japanese Area Army* under the command of Lieutenant General Shigenori Kuroda was charged with the ground defense of the Philippines. This army consisted of about 260,000 men stationed throughout the archipelago. (See Chart 2). Under the overall command of the *Fourteenth Area Army*, the *Thirty-Fifth Army* was to defend the Visayas and Mindanao. The Japanese *Combined Fleet*, under Admiral Toyoda, consisted of a *Striking Force*, the *First Mobile Fleet*, as well as the *Second, Third, Fifth, and Sixth Fleets*. Japanese air defense of the Philippines was furnished by the *First Air Fleet* of the Imperial Navy and the *Fourth Air Army*. Subsequently, the *Second Air Fleet* was moved from Formosa to the Philippines and joined with the *First Air Fleet* and the *Fourth Air Army* to form the *First Combined Air Force* under Vice Admiral Shigeru Fukudome. At that time Japanese air strength in the Philippines consisted of 400 aircraft, two-thirds of which were operational.¹⁴

The plan evolved by *Imperial General Headquarters* for the defense of the

Philippines called for the commitment of 10 divisions and 5 brigades. The main force, consisting of 5 divisions and 2 brigades, was to be stationed on Luzon. Four divisions and two brigades were to defend the southern Philippines. One division and one brigade stood by in China and Formosa, ready for immediate movement to the Philippines once an American landing became imminent.

In the end, lack of cooperation between the Japanese armed services resulted in a compromise, which really failed to please any of the Japanese commanders involved.¹⁵ The *Fourth Air Army*, in loose cooperation with the Army and Navy, planned to annihilate the Americans when the invasion force hit the Philippines. Army and Navy aviation units were to destroy American landing fields and carrier-based

¹⁵ "Small manpower and large area to defend, that is how we planned to wage the fight on Luzon Island alone, but if we gave the American Air Force a chance to gain a foothold on islands other than Luzon, these would seriously interfere with Japanese operations on land, sea, and air. So the Japanese decided to fight for any part of the Philippines. If Americans landed in Central or Southern Philippines or North, then the Japanese air and sea forces would have to bear the brunt of battle in an entirely different kind of fighting from ground operations on Luzon. This is something that the armed forces could not understand, that they had to have coordination. About air defense, Navy aviation wanted to fight American carriers and part of the Army air power would be used for this purpose. Army aviation was to concentrate on convoys and when Americans had landed and constructed air bases on land, then the Japanese were to attack there." Official Japanese comment, War History Office, Defense Agency of Japan, Mr. Susumu Nishiura ltr to Head, HistBr, G-3Div, HQMC dtd 16Dec66, in *Philippines Comment File*.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 280-281.

¹⁴ Craven and Cate, *The Pacific*, p. 346.

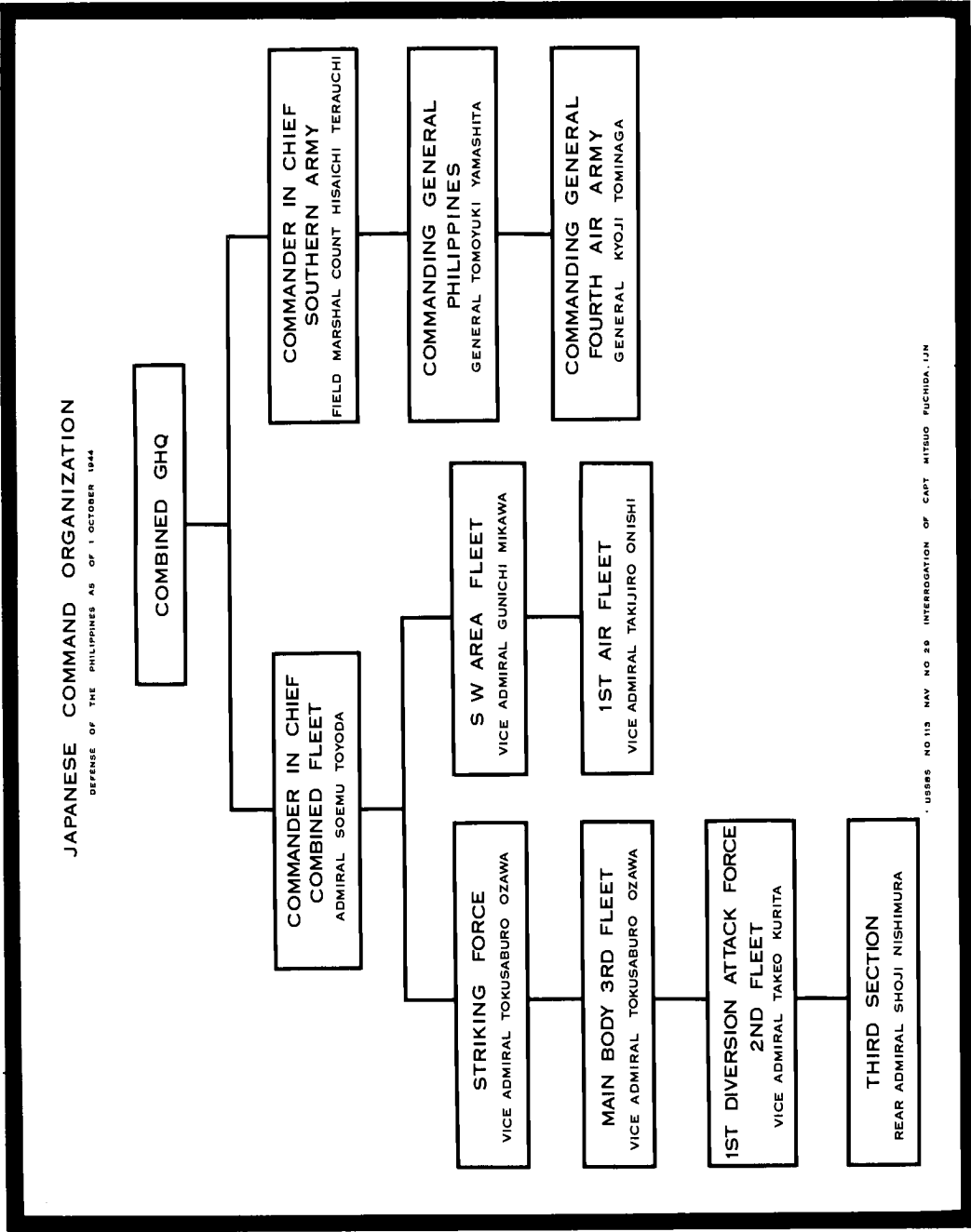


Chart 2

aircraft. Fighter units, based in the central and southern Philippines, were to be committed against the American main force. Japanese heavy bombers were to attack the American convoys; the fighters could be alternately employed against American aircraft or shipping.

A study of battle lessons learned in previous campaigns had led the Japanese planners to conclude that a fight for annihilation at the beachhead did not hold much promise, and for this reason a resistance in depth similar to the one on Peleliu was projected. On 9 October, General Tomoyuki Yamashita assumed command over the *Fourteenth Area Army*, in place of General Kuroda, who was not deemed sufficiently aggressive to cope with the defense of the Philippines.

In preparation for the American invasion of the Philippines, the Japanese Navy planned to concentrate its strength for a decisive action in defense of Japan proper and of the chain of islands linking Japan with the southern islands. Once the Americans struck at any of these vital areas, the Japanese Navy was to fight a decisive battle with all the strength it could muster. The overall mission was to intercept and destroy the Americans within the operational sphere of Japanese land-based aircraft.

Even before the American invasion of the Philippines got under way, however, the Japanese suffered heavy losses in Army aircraft, carriers, and carrier-based planes. As a result, land-based Japanese aircraft would have to bear the brunt of the American attack. The timing of the American invasion of the

Philippines also was a factor that caused concern to the Japanese. Admiral Toyoda expressed his sentiments in the following words:

I expected your offensive against the Philippines would commence around August or September; that is not to say that we were prepared at the time to meet that offensive, for the reason that our forces, both Army and Navy, had lost practically all their supporting aircraft at the various operations and it took anywhere from four to five months to replenish the lost aircraft.¹⁶

When the Allied invasion came on 20 October 1944, uncertainty paralyzed the enemy and prevented him from taking immediate counteraction at the time when troops were en route to the shore and American shipping was extremely vulnerable to air attack. Admiral Toyoda delayed alerting his forces until American warships were actually observed entering Leyte Gulf. Several days were to pass before the Japanese Navy could pit its still formidable might against the U.S. Third and Seventh Fleets.

PLANNING TO RETURN¹⁷

The only Marines to participate in ground action in the Philippines were approximately 1,500 Marine artillerymen under the command of Brigadier General Thomas E. Bourke. The attachment of this Marine force, which consisted of the corps artillery of the V Amphibious Corps (hereafter VAC) to the Army XXIV Corps had a strange

¹⁶ *Toyoda Interrogation*, p. 316.

¹⁷ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*; Halsey and Bryan, *Admiral Halsey's Story*.

background. During the campaign in the Marianas (Operation FORAGER), most of the corps artillery of XXIV Corps had been detached to VAC.

In view of the circumstance, CinCPOA decided to attach elements of VAC artillery to the XXIV Corps for the Yap operation. Initially, Headquarters Battery, VAC artillery, three 155-mm gun battalions, two 155mm howitzer battalions, and one Army field artillery observation battalion were to support the assault on Yap. The three gun battalions were to include one Army and two Marine battalions; the two 155mm howitzer battalions were to consist of one Marine and one Army battalion each. Subsequently, because of a shortage of shipping, one Marine gun battalion was deleted.

While planning for the Yap operation was still in progress, the VAC units slated for attachment to the XXIV Corps were stationed in Hawaii, as was Headquarters, XXIV Corps. When the invasion of Yap was cancelled and planning for the recapture of Leyte got underway, the VAC artillerymen, still under the command of General Bourke, remained attached to the XXIV Corps.

The revamping of the command structure in the Southwest Pacific did not fail to leave an imprint on the organization of aviation units in the theater. Under the overall control of SWPA, Lieutenant General George C. Kenney had been commanding Allied Air Forces and the U.S. Fifth Air Force. Transfer of the U.S. Fifth and Thirteenth Air Forces, the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, and other Allied aviation units to SWPA made a revision of the air command

structure necessary. General Kenney exercised a dual command over Allied Air Forces and the next lower echelon, the Far East Air Forces. (See Chart 3). The latter command consisted of the Fifth and Thirteenth Air Forces; units of the Royal Australian and the Royal New Zealand Air Forces, Aircraft Seventh Fleet (U. S. Navy), and Aircraft Northern Solomons with the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing came under Allied Air Forces.

Under the peculiarities of the command structure in the Pacific, it was more commonly the rule rather than the exception for a commander to exercise a dual function. Aircraft Northern Solomons (AirNorSols) was no exception. The headquarters, first established by Admiral Halsey in his capacity as ComSoPac, was a composite of Marine, Navy, New Zealand, Australian, and U.S. Army Air Forces units then based in the Solomons. Major General Ralph J. Mitchell, USMC, commanded AirNorSols and the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing (1st MAW) simultaneously from his headquarters at Torokina, Bougainville Island. In addition to Marine aviation units, all remaining Allied aviation in the Solomons came under General Mitchell's command. Many of Mitchell's aviators were experienced and battle-hardened; others were new arrivals from the States getting their first taste of combat.

As early as May 1944, General Mitchell had made the rounds of various headquarters in Brisbane, Australia, in order to sell an idea. In addition to approaching General MacArthur, General Mitchell also conferred with the Commander of the Seventh Fleet, Vice Ad-

ORGANIZATION OF AIR COMMAND SWPA

15 JUNE 1944

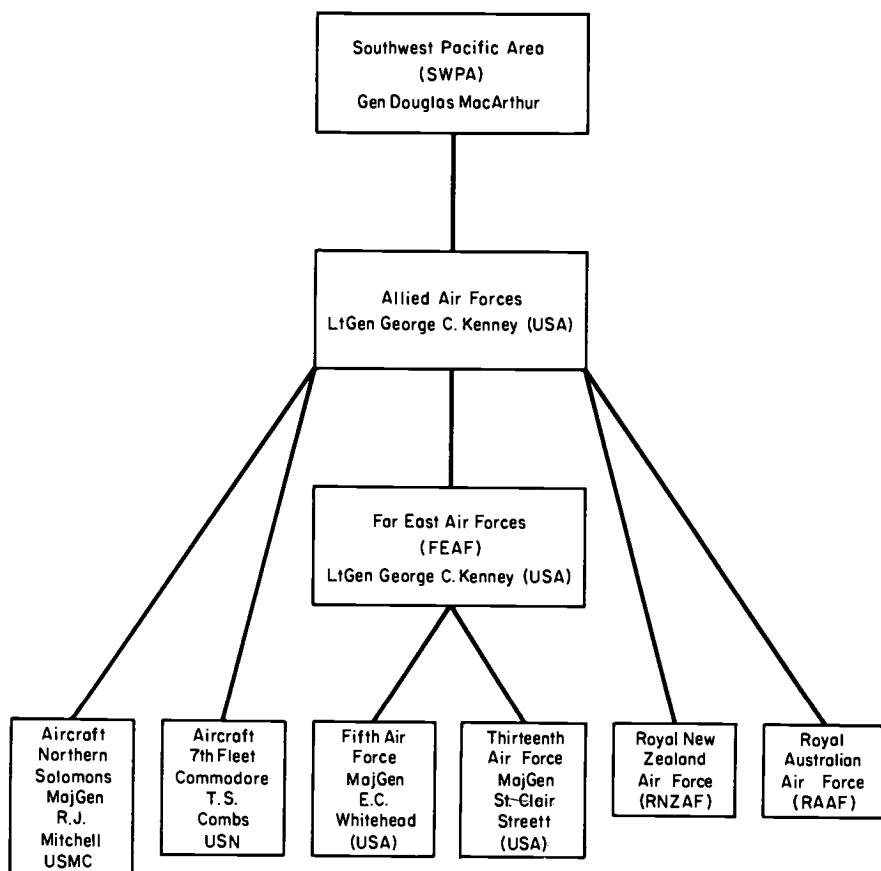


CHART 3

K.W.WHITE

miral Thomas C. Kinkaid, and General Kenney. The Marine general was attempting to draw the attention of SWPA Headquarters to the fact that under his command, a large number of well-trained and experienced aviation units were not being utilized to best advantage, even though they were eager to participate in operations farther west.¹⁸ Japanese air power in the Northern Solomons and on New Britain was no longer in evidence and many of the aviators felt that they were beating a dead horse.

Initially, these entreaties appeared to fall on deaf ears. A ray of hope for the restive Marine aviators appeared briefly and flickered out when General Kenney directed AirNorSols to support the planned U.S. Army XIV Corps drive from the Solomons to New Ireland, then called off the move because shipping and forward airfields were not available. The Marine aviators pounded Rabaul and Kavieng without much enthusiasm, still trying to find ways and means to get some real action.

Just when it appeared that the eager Marine aviators would be forced to sit out the remainder of the war as actors in a sideshow, fate intervened and a radical change in the situation occurred. On 12 September Admiral Halsey's Third Fleet struck the Central Philippines. In three days of almost continuous air attacks, averaging 1,200 sorties per day, pilots of the Third Fleet downed 173 enemy aircraft, destroyed an additional 305 on the ground, sank 59 ships, probably sank another 58, and inflicted heavy damage on installations.

at the cost of 9 aircraft. The implications of this victory were at once apparent to Admiral Halsey, who felt that:

... we had found the central Philippines a hollow shell with weak defenses and skimpy facilities. In my opinion, this was the vulnerable belly of the imperial dragon. The time might be ripe not only to strike Manila, but perhaps to mount a far larger offensive. Specifically, I began to wonder whether I dared recommend that MacArthur shift to Leyte the invasion which he had planned for Mindanao, and advance the date well ahead of the scheduled November 15.¹⁹

Admiral Halsey made his recommendation, and on 15 September the Joint Chiefs of Staff decided to bypass Mindanao in favor of Leyte. Five days later, Far East Air Forces announced that seven dive bomber squadrons of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing would be committed against Luzon. On 10 October, Brigadier General Claude A. Larkin, Deputy Commander of the 1st MAW, summoned Colonel Lyle H. Meyer, commanding officer of MAG-24, and informed him that the group was to get ready to provide air support to Army ground forces in the Philippines. Later information revealed that the remaining three dive bombing squadrons of the wing would become attached to another headquarters, but accompany MAG-24. MAG-32 was sent from Pearl Harbor, and Colonel Clayton C. Jerome, Chief of Staff to the Commander, AirNorSols, took command.

It appeared that Marine aviators were finally back in a shooting war again. The major impact of the new

¹⁸ MajGen Ralph J. Mitchell memo to Maj Gen Field Harris, dtd 26Mar46.

¹⁹ Halsey and Bryan, *Admiral Halsey's Story*, p. 199.

mission fell on MAG-24, whose operations officer, Lieutenant Colonel Keith B. McCutcheon, had to come to grips with planning for effective support of ground troops. The job promised to be far from easy. As Lieutenant Colonel McCutcheon himself expressed it:

When Marine Air Group 24 was informed early in October 1944, that it would give close support to an Army Corps in the Philippines, it was completely unprepared to fulfill its mission. Efforts were made immediately to assemble all the available literature on the subject but it became clearly apparent that the existing instructions were published piecemeal in many forms and much of the data was contradictory. . . .²⁰

In developing a new concept of close air support, Lieutenant Colonel McCutcheon was able to utilize the tools that had been previously tested by others. For instance, the radio gear that was to play such a significant role in the maintenance of ground-air communications had been obtained early in 1942 by Major Peter P. Schrider who at the time served as Air Officer for the Amphibious Training Command at Quantico under General Holland Smith. With the assistance of other aviators, communication experts, and supply personnel, Schrider, anticipating a future need for a forward air controller, experimented with portable and jeep-mounted radio equipment for direct contact with supporting air. These tests, which were conducted in the Chesapeake Bay area, included the employment of front line marking panels.

²⁰ LtCol Keith B. McCutcheon, "Close Support Aviation," in *Marine Aviation in Close Air Support File*, HQMC-DivAvn, Aug-Nov 45, hereafter *McCutcheon Rpt.*

Subsequently, the experiences gained were used with success in the training of Army battalions in amphibious operations.²¹

In his efforts to set forth his doctrine of close air support, Lieutenant Colonel McCutcheon had the full support of Colonel Jerome, Commanding Officer of MAG-32. The latter, in the words of one of his contemporaries, represented

. . . the firm guiding hand behind all this endeavor. It was Colonel Jerome who set the general policy for implementation of close air support and who, through imagination, persuasion, salesmanship, and sheer force of personality brought his various commands so satisfactorily into the overall combat picture. . . .²²

The time for the formulation of a clearcut doctrine for close air support had arrived; once such a procedure had been devised, it would remain for Marine aviators to test it in the crucible of combat.

TRAINING FOR CLOSE AIR SUPPORT²³

The changed combat mission of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing immediately raised a number of questions in the minds of responsible Marine planners. Foremost among these was the question of the techniques that should be

²¹ Col Zebulon C. Hopkins ltr to Head, Hist Br, G-3 Div, HQMC, dtd 2Nov66, in *Philippines Comment File*.

²² LtGen Vernon J. McCaul ltr to Head, Hist Br, G-3 Div, HQMC, dtd 5Nov66, in *Philippines Comment File*.

²³ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: 1st MAW Hist and WarD, Jul-Dec44; Records of Committee on History and Doctrine of Close Air Support, DivAvn, HQMC, 8Nov45, hereafter *CAS Recs.*

employed to give the most effective support to the infantry while still keeping within the generally accepted bounds of caution to avoid endangering the lives of friendly forces.

Though generally favored as a necessity, close air support had previously been employed on the basis of spur of the moment decisions, and with varying degrees of success. On Guadalcanal, Marine and Army pilots had given an excellent account of themselves in providing effective close support—so close, in fact that prior to taking off on a mission they could frequently get a look at the target from the ground. But long before World War II, back in 1927, Marine aviators had taken credit for the first organized dive bombing attack and possibly the first low-altitude attack ever launched in support of ground troops. On that occasion, Marine aviators in Nicaragua had first dived out of column from 1,500 feet and pulled out at about 600 feet. In subsequent dives the Marines started their run at 1,000 feet and pulled out at 300.²⁴

During the New Georgia campaign, close air support for ground troops suffered from a lack of air-ground coordination. The simple truth was that the friendly ground troops were afraid of the bombers. At the time, close air support meant bombing and strafing about 1,000 yards in front of friendly lines, but under conditions of jungle warfare the front lines were frequently only a few yards apart. The difficulties encountered by Marine aviators attempting to provide close support on New Georgia have been described as follows:

The use of aircraft in close support of ground troops proved to be impractical. The dense jungle encountered made the location of enemy positions suitable for air attack impossible until friendly troops were too close to the prospective target for safety. As 200 to 300 yards was a good day's advance, it was not practical to withdraw sufficiently to use air attacks. . . . Frequently troops could not locate their own position on the map, much less the position of the enemy.²⁵

During the Bougainville campaign in 1943, close air support was still regarded with more than casual suspicion, once again for the reason that ground troops had occasionally been bombed by the planes they had requested. On 13 December 1943, in an attempt to dislodge the enemy from "Hellzapoppin' Ridge," one of the attacking aircraft missed the target and instead hit friendly troops 600 yards away, killing two men and wounding six. Despite this mishap, close air support was redeemed when Marine aviators, attacking with delayed-fuze bombs, greatly aided the ground troops in seizing the obstinately defended ridge. Marines who fought at Bougainville had this to say about the air support they had received:

It was the air attacks which proved to be the most effective factor in the taking of the ridge. Lieutenant Colonel Butler, Executive Officer of the 21st Marines, was ordered to plot and direct the strikes. He flew with the flight leader to spot the enemy positions, with which he was now thoroughly familiar.

The two final strikes proved to be the most successful examples of close air support thus far in the Pacific war. The

²⁴ Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*, p. 25.

²⁵ Headquarters New Georgia Air Force (Forward Echelon, MAW-2) SAR, 29Jun-13Aug43, as cited in Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*, p. 151.

planes, flying at times only fifty feet above the ground, bombed and strafed the enemy as close as 75 yards from the Marines' positions. The Japanese, who held out so desperately against infantry and artillery attack, were almost completely destroyed. Following the second air strike the 1st Battalion, Twenty-First Marines smashed through the last resistance with bayonet and grenade on the afternoon of December 18.²⁶

The above action marked the first time that Marine aviators received credit for a support mission that was beyond the capabilities of the artillery. After Bougainville, there was an extended lull as far as Marine air support for Marine ground forces was concerned. Peleliu offered a welcome opportunity to further improve ground-air coordination, though conditions on that island severely limited the effectiveness of air support; the Ngeesebus operation offered an even more graphic illustration of what close support during a shore-to-shore landing could accomplish.

The Navy had partially solved the problem of controlling support aircraft through shipborne radio systems, which greatly reduced the time required to coach aircraft to their targets. Since this method was geared to carrier-based air support, the Marine divisions employed air liaison parties to transmit requests for aerial support and to direct air strikes. The Marine concept of close air support differed from that of the Army or the Navy in that it was felt that members of the air liaison

parties, stationed in the front lines, should maintain direct communications with the attacking aircraft instead of having the information channelled through intervening echelons.

Under the supervision of Lieutenant Colonel McCutcheon, operations officer of MAG-24, a detailed doctrine for air support organization was drawn up. Aside from special equipment and conditions that could be expected in the Philippines, the doctrine was based on the premise that close air support is an additional weapon to be employed at the discretion of the ground commander. He may employ it against targets that cannot be reached by other weapons or in conjunction with the ground weapons in a coordinated attack. It should be immediately available and should be carried out with deliberation and accuracy and in coordination with other assigned units.²⁷

In addition to outlining the requirements for communications equipment, the establishment of radio nets, and the implementation of procedures that would ensure accurate and efficient air support when and where needed, the doctrine put forth the following points:

1. Air support does not supplant any of the other existing weapons and it cannot be considered a general competitor of either field or naval artillery.
2. Aircraft provide a mobile platform for transporting projectiles to the enemy, but if the same target is within artillery range, the latter can deliver a heavier and more accurate volume of fire per unit of time than aircraft.

²⁶ Robert A. Aurthur and Kenneth Cohlma, *The Third Marine Division* (Washington: Infantry Journal Press, 1948), p. 78.

²⁷ LtCol Keith B. McCutcheon, "Close Air Support SOP," *Marine Corps Gazette*, v. 29, no. 8 (Aug45), pp. 48-50.

3. When the infantry commander is bogged down and he makes an estimate of the situation, he must weigh clearly the advisability of using aircraft in preference to artillery. Unless the attack is coordinated closely, the planes will not do enough damage to warrant the cessation of fire by the artillery for the necessary length of time.²⁸

Once the doctrine of close air support had been formulated, it remained for MAG-24 to implement it by training personnel for the impending mission. Beginning on 13 October, only three days after Colonel Meyer had received word of the new mission of MAG-24, its pilots, crews, communications personnel, air combat intelligence officers, and operations officers on Bougainville were subjected to an intensive ground school course. This course, which lasted until 8 December, covered all phases of close air support ranging from organization and tactics of U.S. and Japanese infantry units to map reading, communications, artillery spotting, and target identification. Similarly, personnel were also familiarized with the geography and history of the Philippines, as well as the peculiarities of the Philippine climate.

Lieutenant Colonel McCutcheon, who supervised the training, handpicked his instructors and finally emerged with a cadre of wing and group intelligence officers, and specialists from the Seventh Fleet intelligence section and the staff of two Army divisions stationed on Bougainville at the time. One of the Army units, the 37th Infantry Division, scheduled joint training prob-

lems with the Marine aviators. All pilots were able to observe a ground exercise conducted by an infantry battalion simulating an attack on a Japanese pillbox installation. To these exercises, MAG-24 added planes in close support with their own air liaison parties on the ground. No live bombs were dropped during the training exercises, but the infantry actually fired all of its weapons. Altogether, about 500 Marine pilots and gunners attended the course; a final examination and critique determined the effectiveness of the training.

Concurrently with the training program, a series of conferences were scheduled with representatives of the Fifth Air Force to coordinate planning for the Philippine operation. In the course of these conferences it was brought out that the Fifth Air Force would furnish the support air parties, but Fifth Air Force did not contemplate using direct communication between the air liaison parties and the aircraft engaged in a close air support mission. The Navy concurred with the Army Air Forces in this matter. As far as Lieutenant Colonel McCutcheon was concerned, the only logical way to conduct close support was to train and utilize Marine air liaison parties, which actually constituted a combination of the air liaison party and the support air party.

The Army Air Forces agreed with a statement expressed by the British Field Marshal Sir Bernard L. Montgomery:

. . . that though a tactical air force must be integrated with the ground force,

²⁸ *Ibid.*

it must not be tied in piecemeal lots to ground units. Its function was massed, theatre wide blows and deep penetrations to fill the gap between tactical and strategic operations.²⁹

According to the interpretation by MAG-24, Marshal Montgomery was correct, though close support aviation was not identical with tactical aviation and there was a decided difference in the employment of the two. MAG-24 had no intention of attaching units to divisions piecemeal; it did plan to maintain close control of its aircraft when engaged in close support. If Marine liaison parties were not to be permitted to maintain that control, then the group would send out its own personnel to exercise it in accordance with the SOP that had been very carefully developed for close support by Marine aviation.

MAG-24 planned to attach air liaison parties to infantry units down to the battalion level. Utilizing radio-equipped jeeps (AN-VRC-1), air liaison personnel functioned like forward observers. The ALP could keep pace with advancing command posts and still remain in

constant communication with aircraft. The radio equipment could be used to operate on Very High Frequencies (VHF) with the SCR-542 for short-range communications or with the SCR-193 on the lower frequencies (HF) where longer distances had to be covered. If, for any reason, the air liaison officer had to leave his jeep, he could still use a portable transceiver³⁰ or field telephone, the latter to keep in touch with the jeep radio operator, who in turn relayed messages to the aircraft.

A guide for the successful employment of close air support had now been established. Out of a hazy idea had grown a plan, which evolved into a concept. At maturity it became a doctrine that Marines could translate into action. In the short time available, all possible training that would assist Marine aviation personnel in the air and on the ground to put the theory into practice, had been given. The stage was set for the ultimate test.

²⁹ Field Marshal Sir Bernard L. Montgomery in *TIME* Magazine, v. 44, no. 7, p. 28, 14Aug 44, cited in *McCutcheon Rpt*, p. 9.

³⁰ A radio capable of transmitting and receiving, usually compact because part of the circuit is alternately used for either function. Each ALP was provided with a TBX portable HF radio set to meet the initial communication needs of the party.

The Leyte Landings¹

The seizure of Peleliu and Morotai provided Allied forces in the Pacific with important air bases and airfield sites. Above all, control of these islands protected General MacArthur's flanks during the impending invasion of the Philippines. The accelerated timetable for operations in the Pacific called for landings on Leyte on 20 October 1944. Under the overall command of General MacArthur, the Seventh Fleet, under Vice Admiral Thomas C. Kinkaid, was to transport and establish the ground assault force ashore. Lieutenant General Walter Krueger, Commanding General of the Sixth Army, was to command the ground forces. The Third Fleet, in conjunction with the Seventh Fleet, was to provide air support until Army Air Forces units could begin to initiate operations from airfields on Leyte.²

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: Seventh Flt Rpt of Op for the Capture of Leyte Island Incl AR of Engagements in Surigao Strait and off Samar Island on 25Oct44, hereafter *Com, Seventh Flt AR, Leyte*; 4th Marine Air Wing Operations Report, Leyte, dtd 11Nov44, hereafter *4th MAW OpRpt*; M. Hamlin Cannon, *Leyte: The Return to the Philippines—The War in the Pacific—U. S. Army in World War II* (Washington: OCMH, DA, 1953), hereafter Cannon, *Leyte*; Saburo Hayashi and Alvin D. Coox, *Kōgun—The Japanese Army in the Pacific War* (Quantico, Va.: Marine Corps Association, 1959), hereafter Hayashi and Coox, *Kōgun*.

² For a detailed account of command rela-

By far the most important mission assigned to Admiral Halsey's Third Fleet was the preinvasion neutralization of Japanese air power on Okinawa, Formosa, Northern Leyte, and the Visayan Islands in the Central Philippines. Admiral Kinkaid's Seventh Fleet was directly responsible for providing air cover for the invasion ships and for furnishing direct air support for the landings until land-based aircraft could assume those functions. The Fifth Air Force, based on New Guinea, was to destroy the enemy air forces in the Celebes Sea, neutralize Japanese air power in Mindanao, and give such protection to ships as it was able to provide. The Thirteenth Air Force, also stationed on New Guinea, and elements of the Royal Australian Air Force were slated to play a supporting role in neutralizing Japanese air along the east coast of Borneo and in assisting upon request the Fifth Air Force in the southern Philippines. Additional Army Air Forces units in China and the Central Pacific would furnish long-range support.

The island of Leyte, lying in the Visayas Group of the Central Philippines, is 115 miles in length and varies in width from 15 to 40 miles. The main mountain range runs the entire length of the island from north to south, leav-

tions during this period, see Morison, *Leyte*, pp. 55–60.

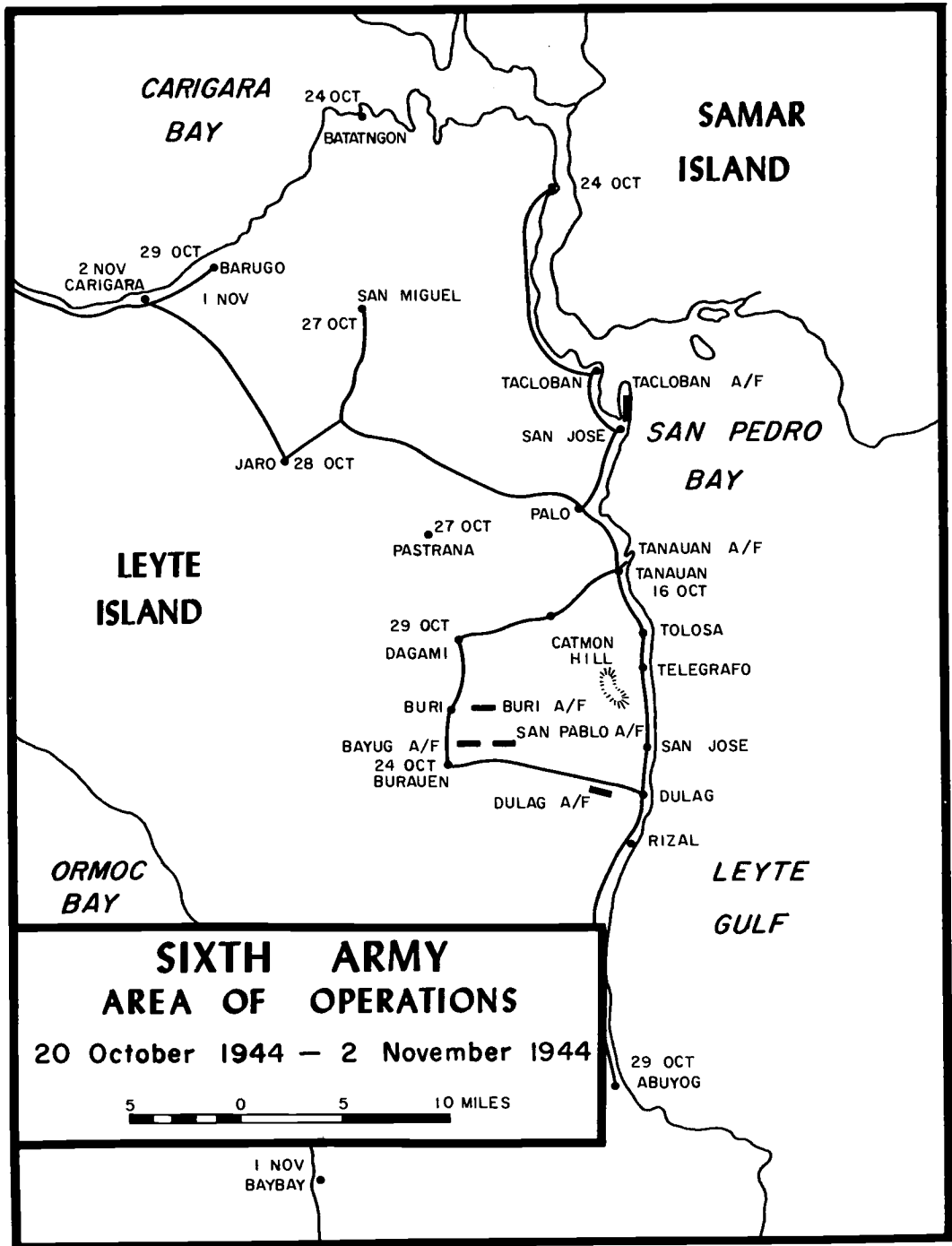
ing a wide coastal plain along the east coast. At the outbreak of World War II, the population of 916,000 lived chiefly in the coastal areas, where cultivation of available ground was intense. Crops consisted mainly of coconut, corn, hemp, and rice. The area in which the invasion force was to operate initially did not contain any heavy jungle and was reasonably clear of thick undergrowth. Some difficulty was expected from swamps and marshy ground, which bordered the intricate network of rivers flowing eastward from the mountains to the coast. All beaches in the invasion area were hard sand, with no reefs or obstacles offshore.

The Sixth Army troops for Operation KING II, code name for the invasion of Leyte, were composed of the X and XXIV Corps and the 6th Ranger Battalion. The X Corps included the 1st Cavalry Division and the 24th Infantry Division; the XXIV Corps consisted of the 7th and 96th Infantry Divisions. In reserve were the 32d and 77th Infantry Divisions at Hollandia and on Morotai and Guam Islands. The two divisions were prepared to embark for the objective area three days after the invasion date.

The Sixth Army had the mission of seizing and occupying Leyte, establishing control of western and southern Samar until the conquest of that island could be completed, and of destroying other hostile garrisons in the Visayas. The operation was to be carried out in three phases, beginning with capture of the entrance to Leyte Gulf. Large scale amphibious landings along the coast of eastern Leyte between Tacloban and

Dulag were to usher in the second phase. Initial objective of the invasion force was the seizure of airfields and potential airfield sites in this area. The third and final phase of the operation envisioned the destruction of Japanese forces on Leyte and southern Samar. Within the scope of this overall plan, X Corps was to seize the area between Tacloban and Palo and launch a drive to the northern tip of the island. The XXIV Corps was to land near Dulag to the south of X Corps and advance westward across Leyte. A regimental combat team was to invade southern Leyte and secure Panaon Straits.

The first phase of the plan was readily accomplished on 17 and 18 October, when the islands barring access to Leyte Gulf were seized. There was no enemy resistance. Following a two-day naval bombardment, the main landings got under way on the east coast of Leyte between Dulag and Tacloban on 20 October. (See Map 17). The combined American beachhead was about 18 miles long. Except for Japanese mortar and artillery fire, enemy resistance at the beaches was light. X Corps seized the Tacloban airfield on A-Day and captured the town of Tacloban on the following day. From Tacloban, the corps advanced in a northerly and northwesterly direction. Elements of the XXIV Corps secured Dulag airfield on 21 October, then swerved westward and seized three airfields near Burauen. Troops of the XXIV Corps pivoted south along Leyte Gulf, seized Abuyog on 29 October, then swerved westward, and, cutting across the island, secured Baybay on the west coast of Leyte.



Map 17

E.L. Wilson

Japanese reaction to the American landings on Leyte consisted of a hurried activation of *Sho* No. 1. On 23 October, a Japanese fleet headed for Leyte to seek battle in a last-ditch attempt to halt the Americans. A decoy carrier force was to divert the Americans, while the two other surface forces, protected by Japanese aircraft on Luzon and Samar, were approaching Leyte Gulf through Surigao and San Bernardino Straits. The Japanese aimed at nothing less than the complete destruction of American shipping near the landing beaches.

The resulting major naval engagement, which lasted from 23-26 October, has become known as the Battle for Leyte Gulf.³ The Japanese came close to achieving their objective, but not quite close enough. By evening of 26 October, the Japanese had lost four carriers, three battleships, six heavy and four light cruisers, nine destroyers, and a submarine. "For all practical purposes, the Japanese Navy, as a navy, had ceased to exist."⁴ American naval losses in this battle, consisting of three small escort carriers, two destroyers, and one destroyer escort⁵ were heavy but not crippling. Responsible Japanese commanders subsequently blamed in large part the loss of the Battle of Leyte Gulf and the defeat in the Philippines on Japanese weakness in land-based air, "October saw the end of the Japanese air forces in the conventional sense; what had once been a formidable weapon was transformed perforce

into a sacrificial army of guided missiles."⁶

The Battle for Leyte Gulf was to have an interesting aftermath for at least a few Marine aviators. During the summer of 1944 General Mitchell, commander of the 1st MAW, had been unsuccessful in getting a combat assignment for his wing for the planned invasion of the Philippines. Even though Marine aviation was not assigned any part in the Leyte landings, a few aviators were assigned as observers during the invasion of Leyte. As a result, General Mitchell and three members of his staff took part in the landings and went ashore on A-Day with elements of the Fifth Air Force. On 25 October, while the Battle of Leyte Gulf was still in progress, more than a hundred U.S. naval aircraft, whose carriers had been sunk or severely damaged, were forced to land at Tacloban and Dulag airfields. The field at Tacloban was in deplorable shape; amphibious vehicles had churned up the ground, converting it into a veritable sea of mud and even though repairs had been started, the field was in no condition for the emergency landings by Navy aircraft.

Fortunately, General Mitchell and his staff were at Tacloban airfield at this crucial time. As an experienced aviator General Mitchell realized that the only place for safe landings was to the right of the field, where the original sod was still firm. The wing commander promptly seized a pair of signal flags, ran to the end of the strip, and, acting as a landing signal officer, assisted the Navy planes in making a safe landing. At

³ For a detailed description of this battle, see Morison, *Leyte*, pp. 168-343.

⁴ USSBS, *Pacific Campaigns*, p. 286.

⁵ Cannon, *Leyte*, p. 92.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 283.



NAVY PLANES from carriers sunk or damaged during the Battle for Leyte Gulf find refuge at Dulag airfield, Leyte, 25 October 1944. (USMC A700601)



RADAR-EQUIPPED NIGHT FIGHTERS of VMF(N)-541 over Leyte. (USMC A700605)

the Dulag airstrip, about 20 miles south of Tacloban, the Navy pilots were not quite so lucky, and 8 out of the 40 aircraft attempting to land cracked up. There were no bombs, ammunition, or gasoline at Dulag, and barges had to transport those items there to enable the aircraft to become operational again by the following day.⁷

Difficulties with soft and muddy airstrips apparently were not limited to the Americans; a Japanese account of the Leyte operation mentions "a marked increase in the number of crippled planes because of poor maintenance of the air fields. . . . It became impossible for the supply to catch up with the losses."⁸

Marine aviation, aside from General Mitchell's providential presence at Tacloban, did not play a direct part in the Leyte landings or the early phase of the Leyte campaign. Nevertheless, about 1,500 Marines were deeply involved in the operation from its outset and were to contribute materially to the liberation of the island.

SUPPORTING ARTILLERY⁹

The Marines that took part in the Leyte landings were elements of the

VAC Artillery, which had been attached to the XXIV Corps earlier in 1944, while still at Hawaii. The Marine complement consisted of the 5th 155mm Howitzer Battalion under the command of Lieutenant Colonel James E. Mills; the 11th 155mm Gun Battalion, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Thomas S. Ivey, and Headquarters Battery, led by Captain George K. Acker. Army field artillery battalions in the XXIV Corps were the 198th Field Artillery Battalion (155mm Howitzer), the 226th Field Artillery Battalion (155mm Gun), and the 287th Field Artillery Battalion (Observation).

The Marine artillery elements assigned to the XXIV Corps, as well as the 226th Field Artillery Battalion, had been formed from former seacoast artillery units; though familiar with heavy artillery, the men had received only rudimentary field artillery training. Prior to the departure of these units from Hawaii, the Marine artillery had undergone intensive field artillery training. Embarkation of personnel from Hawaii was accomplished between 6 and 14 September 1944.

The two Marine artillery battalions and the headquarters battery were embarked in the LSV USS *Monitor* and the LSV USS *Catskill*. General Bourke, on board the amphibious command ship USS *Mount Olympus*, served as XXIV Corps Artillery Officer as well as its coordinator for naval gunfire, air strikes, and artillery support. Equipment for the artillery battalions was carried by the cargo ship USS *Auriga*. The ships arrived at Eniwetok in the

⁷ Kenney, *Reports*, p. 459.

⁸ Hayashi and Coox, *Kōgun*, p. 127.

⁹ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: A History of the X Corps in the Leyte-Samar Philippine Islands Operation, dtd 6Jan45, hereafter *CG X Corps Hist*; VAC Arty SAR, Leyte, dtd 6Jan45, hereafter *VAC Arty SAR*; VAC Arty OpRpt, Leyte, dtd 28Dec44, hereafter *VAC Arty OpRpt*; 5th 155mm HowBn SAR, dtd 28May45, hereafter *5th 155mm HowBn SAR*; *Woodbury Rpt*; Maj Edwin J. St. Peter Rpt, Leyte, dtd 7Dec44, hereafter *St. Peter Rpt*; Maj Justin

G. Duryea Rpt, Leyte, dtd 13Nov44, hereafter *Duryea Rpt*.

Marshalls on 25 September and three days later sailed for the final staging area at Manus Island in the Admiralties, where they arrived on 3 October. A Marine observer attached to the 5th 155mm Howitzer Battalion shed an interesting sidelight on the manner in which the troops learned of their objective:

Two days out of Pearl Harbor (17Sep44), a PBY bomber dropped dispatches containing information changing the target from STALEMATE II to KING II. This information was not disseminated to the troops when we arrived at Eniwetok on 25 September 1944, but upon arrival at Manus Island (Admiralty Group) on 3 October 1944, said information was passed on to the lower command echelon. As a result, the name and date of the landing on Leyte Island was known even to the enlisted personnel while the ships of the convoys were still in the last staging area. Unfortunately this information was common talk among all hands and no great attempt, in general, was made to preserve the secrecy necessary in an operation of this kind.¹⁰

On 14 October the invasion fleet departed Manus Island for Leyte. The ships in which the corps artillery was embarked arrived in the transport area off Leyte during the morning of 20 October. Naval bombardment of the objective began at approximately 0745 and continued for two hours. Shortly before 1000, Sixth Army units began the invasion of Leyte. X Corps, on the right of the Sixth Army front, landed on the northern part of the invasion beaches; XXIV Corps, consisting of the 7th Infantry Division on the left (south) and the 96th Infantry Division on the right (north) established a

southern beachhead. The landings did not take place earlier in the day because the ships could not risk a passage through minefields at night. In the words of a Marine observer with the 96th Infantry Division:

... the landing was perfect. LCI rocket boats and gun boats preceded the first waves of (amtracs) to the beach and laid down heaviest concentration of rocket, 40mm and 20mm fire used to date on a beach in the Pacific. All troops landed on schedule and proceeded inland without opposition. Not many more than 15 mortar shells landed in the water or on the beaches, and in the entire division only 2 dead and 14 wounded were suffered in getting ashore.¹¹

As units of the X and XXIV Corps were going ashore and setting up beachheads, the artillerymen remained on board their ships. Reports from the beachheads indicated that the Japanese tactics differed completely from those encountered in the Central Pacific. The Japanese no longer concentrated their resistance on the beaches but defended the interior of the island. Owing to the large land area, the Japanese had the problem of properly utilizing their limited manpower. The Japanese *16th Infantry Division* with attached service troops was charged with the defense of Leyte. The division was disposed with the *33d Infantry* to the north, in the zone of the X Corps, the *9th Infantry* to the south opposite the XXIV Corps, and the *20th Infantry* in reserve between Dulag and Tanauan. It was estimated that there were 20,000 Japanese on Leyte, including between 5,000 and 10,000 labor and service troops mostly employed in airfield construc-

¹⁰ *St. Peter Rpt*, p. 2.

¹¹ *Duryea Rpt*, p. 1.

tion and maintenance in the area around Tacloban, San Jose, Burauen, and Dagami.¹²

As the Sixth Army beachheads were established and expanded, it became evident that the Leyte landings had come as a complete surprise for the enemy. The beaches on which the 96th Infantry Division landed were undefended, though two Japanese antitank guns in the landing area of the 7th Infantry Division succeeded in knocking out five medium tanks. Aside from this action, the assault troops did not encounter any enemy interference until they had advanced several hundred yards inland. Few defensive installations were found on the beaches and those that were encountered were makeshift and indicative of hasty construction. Though some 75mm artillery and sporadic mortar fire hit the beaches, the enemy made no attempt to mass his fire. No Japanese tanks were in evidence near the invasion area. The biggest obstacle for the first 3,000 yards inland from the beaches was the terrain, which was so swampy and muddy that the advance had to be held up for a day in order to get supplies to the front lines.

On the morning of 21 October, General Bourke ordered all corps artillery units to dispatch advance parties to meet him at Blue One Beach, which was situated just north of Dulag. Owing to communications problems, word of this order reached only the 5th 155mm Howitzer Battalion and the Army 287th Field Artillery Battalion in time. As a result, representatives of these two battalions were the only ones to meet Gen-

eral Bourke before nightfall on 21 October. The remaining hours of daylight were utilized in reconnoitering and selecting initial positions. Advance parties from the 11th 155mm Gun Battalion, the Headquarters Battery of the VAC Artillery, and the Army 226th Artillery Battalion went ashore after nightfall but did not select their positions until the morning of 22 October. At this time General Bourke requested XXIV Corps to land the entire corps artillery.

The Army 198th and 226th Field Artillery Battalions and the 287th Field Artillery Observation Battalion went ashore without undue difficulty. The two Marine artillery battalions and the headquarters battery, on the other hand, ran into a major problem almost at once. The USS *Auriga* (AK-98) which carried the equipment of the Marine units, had been ordered to begin unloading on A-Day by the Commander, Transport Division 28, who had failed to coordinate his operation with either the Commanding General of the XXIV Corps or General Bourke. As a result, when advance parties of the artillery units reached the beach on A plus 1, half of the vehicles and weapons, as well as some ammunition, had already been landed, even though no artillerymen were present on the beach to dispose of this materiel. Equipment was scattered over several beaches and some of the heavy guns had been landed in areas in which no suitable firing positions could be obtained. As a result, positions further inland had to be reconnoitered.

By A plus 3 all of the Marine artillery was ashore, in position, and supporting the XXIV Corps. The first positions

¹² CG, *X Corps Hist*, p. 5.

occupied by the artillery were on a narrow rise about a quarter of a mile inland from the seashore. From here, the artillery was able to support the infantry which advanced northward from the invasion beaches towards an enemy-held hill that was nearly 400 feet high. By this time, the artillery units were well organized, and earlier problems associated with the landing had been overcome. Following in the wake of the infantry advance, the 5th 155mm Howitzer Battalion moved first to positions halfway between Dulag and Burauen and subsequently into the area between Burauen and Dagami. The 11th 155mm Gun Battalion followed within a few days, together with the advance echelon of Headquarters Battery. By evening of 22 October, the 226th Field Artillery Battalion occupied positions on the western outskirts of Dulag and was assigned the mission of reinforcing the fires of the 7th Infantry Division artillery, as the division advanced toward Dulag, Burauen, and Dagami. On the following day the 198th Field Artillery Battalion was assigned the mission of supporting the fires of the 96th Infantry Division Artillery to the north and northwest of San Jose. The 287th Observation Battalion established positions along the highway north of Dulag. By 24 October all units under the command of General Bourke were in position and firing in support of the XXIV Corps.

Since the Japanese were holding terrain to the west that was considerably higher than that held by the invasion force, the enemy had the advantage of superior observation. For the Americans, ground visibility was so poor that

aerial observation assumed an unusual importance. Artillery spotter aircraft soon became the backbone of artillery observation. At the time of the landings some planes were brought in over the beach in a partially disassembled condition, put together, and flown to an airstrip from a narrow, sandy road paralleling the beach. Others took off from their carriers and completed the flight without undue difficulty, except for one plane, whose pilot got lost in a rainstorm and landed in enemy territory on the southern tip of Samar. The pilot, a field artillery officer, kept a cool head, which was badly needed since he carried with him parts of the operation plan. He carefully buried the important document, hid his aircraft as best he could, and, with the assistance of natives, found his way back to the American lines. Subsequently, accompanied by a rescue party, the pilot returned to the scene of the mishap, dug up the papers, repaired the plane, and flew it back to Dulag Field on Leyte.¹³

The observation planes available to the XXIV Corps Artillery consisted of 12 Type L-4 artillery spotter aircraft; a total of 13 pilots comprised the flying personnel; a dozen observers were available to carry out visual observation. The XXIV Corps furnished the pilots and planes; the observers were Marines from the artillery battalions or the Air Section of VAC Artillery Headquarters as well as Army personnel from their artillery battalions. The spotter aircraft also handled such special assignments

¹³ BGen Bert A. Bone ltr to CMC, dtd 5Apr51, hereafter *Bone ltr* in *Philippines Comment File*.

as reconnaissance, search, and photographic missions for the XXIV Corps.

During the first few days of the Leyte operation, Japanese air action consisted of several raids each day. The enemy did not focus his attention on the troops but concentrated his air attacks against American shipping, beach supply dumps, and airfields. In the 96th Infantry Division area, these raids were executed by only two or three planes at a time. Since the beaches were jammed with ammunition, gasoline dumps, and other supplies for nearly 200 yards inland, the Japanese were bound to hit something. "In one raid, over 50 percent of the 7th Division ammunition and gasoline stores were burned up by the one bomb dropped, not to mention other supplies."¹⁴ Beginning on 24 October the tempo of enemy air attacks picked up.

Aside from the destruction of materiel, the enemy air raids had an effect that could hardly have been anticipated by even the most optimistic Japanese. This unexpected byproduct was the confusion they had caused. A Marine observer attached to the Army described the result in the following words:

Air raid warning systems had not been installed. The confusion caused by green troops having first enemy planes and then friendly planes fly over caused them to fire at all planes even when the markings were easily distinguishable. All that was necessary was for one gun to open fire, then all guns would fire even down to troops armed with M-1s and carbines. I personally saw one TBF shot down by our own fire and several others fired on.¹⁵

The indiscriminate firing against aircraft did not end there. According to

another Marine observer, the gun crews of liberty ships and small boats were the worst offenders, probably because of poor recognition training. In any event, before the confusion died down, "they even shot down one cub artillery-spotting plane."¹⁶

By nightfall of 22 October, the 5th Howitzer Battalion and the 226th Field Artillery Battalion were in position ready to fire although the 5th Battalion had only 10 of its 12 pieces emplaced. The Headquarters Battery was also in position with communications to all units at this time. The 287th Observation Battalion had surveyed sufficient terrain to permit the division and the corps artillery to tie in to a common control. The initial area assigned to the 5th and 11th Battalions required the construction of a corduroy road across a small swamp. Both battalions worked on the construction of this road, but the 5th Battalion, which moved into position first, found access so difficult that the corps artillery commander ordered the 11th Battalion to occupy a different area. The battalion moved into its new position during the late afternoon and night of 23 October.

Marine artillerymen on Leyte came close to being actively involved in the Battle of Leyte Gulf. While that battle was reaching a climax, it appeared for a time that the Japanese Central Force would penetrate the screen of warships protecting the American transports. In the words of General Bourke:

I was ordered by General Hodge, the XXIV Corps Commander, to turn the two 155mm Gun Battalions toward Leyte Gulf and prepare for the defense of the Beach-

¹⁴ *Duryea Rpt.*, p. 3.

¹⁵ *Woodbury Rpt.*, p. 5.

¹⁶ *Duryea Rpt.*, p. 4.

head in that direction, against elements of the Japanese Fleet then believed to be approaching. As these battalions were originally trained in Coast Defense Methods this was readily accomplished.¹⁷

As the battle developed, the Japanese did not succeed in breaking through to the beachhead, and the corps artillerymen on Leyte never got a crack at the Japanese Navy. Instead, until 1 November, the XXIV Corps artillery continued to fire reinforcing missions for the division artillery in the beachhead. The marshy ground had a more adverse effect on the siting of positions and efficiency of artillery support than did the tactical situation. More often than not, cross country movement of medium and heavy artillery became impossible and positions had to be selected along roads or in the vicinity of airfields. On numerous occasions, positions to cover target areas could not be selected without frequently shifting the weapons. The 198th Field Artillery Battalion, as late as 1 November, was forced to occupy positions about 1,200 yards behind the front line because of unfavorable terrain. As a result, for several days the artillerymen drew intermittent small arms fire and attracted infiltrators.

On 1 November, the Marine howitzer battalion followed the infantry advance

¹⁷ LtGenThomas E. Bourke ltr to CMC, n.d., hereafter *Bourke ltr*, in *Philippines Comment File*. "The 11th Gun Battalion, near the beach, found itself swinging its guns around to fire on dug-in Japanese positions on Catmon Hill from which the beach and rear area installations were receiving fire. They also had to swing around 180 degrees, prepared to fire at sea." Col James E. Mills ltr to Head, HistBr, G-3 Div, HQMC dtd 7Nov66, in *Philippines Comment File*, hereafter *Mills ltr*.

and displaced inland into the area between Burauen and Dagami. On the same day, the 198th Field Artillery Battalion was assigned the mission of reinforcing the fires of the 96th Infantry Division Artillery in support of operations west and northwest of Dagami. A few days later, the Marine gun battalion and the forward echelon of Headquarters Battery moved into the same general area as the Marine howitzer battalion. The immediate establishment of a fire direction center situated along the road between Burauen and Dagami enabled the artillery to fire massed concentrations along the entire XXIV Corps front. On 4 November, the 226th Field Artillery Battalion was detached to operational control of the X Corps and displaced to that sector.

Heavy rains in November immobilized almost all vehicular traffic in the Burauen-Dagami area. A static period developed along the entire corps front. At this time the artillery battalions often found themselves very close to the front, so that local perimeter defense assumed major importance. Heavy infantry weapons were sited with emphasis on air defense during the day and ground defense at night. At various times all artillery battalions came under enemy air attack, particularly the Marine battalions stationed near newly captured airfields. The 5th Howitzer Battalion claimed two enemy aircraft shot down and the 11th Battalion claimed one; the Army 226th Battalion also took credit for two aircraft downed.¹⁸

Local defense of artillery units consisted of manned positions around each

¹⁸ VAC Arty SAR, p. 7.

battery and barbed wire when possible.¹⁹ Each artillery battalion was bothered from time to time by infiltrating snipers, who attempted to neutralize the batteries by small arms fire which was normally delivered as the artillery pieces fired. In this way the enemy hoped to escape detection by local security details. In some instances at night it became necessary to load the pieces and have the cannoneers take cover before firing. During the night of 24 October, the 226th Artillery Battalion was attacked by about 35 Japanese equipped with automatic weapons, explosive charges, magnetic mines, and grenades. Part of Battery A was temporarily neutralized, and one piece was disabled by an explosive charge. After a heavy exchange of fire the enemy force was scattered. The Japanese left 26 dead around the battalion sector. Remnants of this patrol evidently remained in the swamps around the battalion for some time, and for the next few nights sniping on the artillery position continued.

Since much enemy activity along the front occurred at night, the corps artillery had to maintain intermittent harassing and interdiction fires during the hours of darkness. It soon became evident that after personnel had been provided for all firing installations, the number of men available for local security was scanty. Nevertheless, the

artillerymen performed their missions and despite poor roads, bad weather, and enemy harassment, lent effective support to the advancing infantry units.

In general, the corps artillery missions were the usual interdiction, harassing, and deep supporting fires. Each time a counterbattery mission was fired, air observation was utilized to locate and adjust upon the target. During daylight hours, fires consisted usually of registrations and adjustment on sensitive areas as a basis for night fires. Targets of opportunity were fired on as they appeared. Upon occasion, close supporting fires at night were requested by division artillery during periods of enemy activity.

The Japanese employment of artillery on Leyte was such that it was seldom used to maximum effect. In the words of the U. S. Army history of the Leyte campaign:

The gunnery techniques were "remarkably undeveloped" and inefficient, the pieces being used singly or in pairs and only rarely as batteries. Their fire was never massed. The gun positions generally were well constructed but they were frequently selected with such high regard for concealment that the fields of fire were limited.²⁰

By 2 November the Sixth Army ground offensive on Leyte had attained initial objectives. Advancing up the Leyte Valley, U. S. Army troops had advanced to Dulag, Burauen, Dagami, and Tanauan, reaching the west coast of Leyte on 1 November. Though initially slow to react, the Japanese did not by any means consider their situation on the island hopeless. While the

¹⁹ "The 5th Battalion was in such a forward position that it had to maintain extensive patrol activity to the front and flanks of its position. There were a few patrol encounters with small scattered groups of the enemy. This battalion did not encounter enemy harassment or sniping which is attributable to the patrol activity." *Mills ltr.*

²⁰ Cannon, *Leyte*, p. 252.

Battle of Leyte Gulf was still in progress and American attention was focused on the naval operation, several Japanese infantry battalions from the western Visayas landed at Ormoc on the west coast of Leyte. On 26 October, an additional 2,000 men comprising the *41st Infantry Regiment* from Mindanao went ashore.

These reinforcements were only dribbles of what was shortly to turn into a torrent of men and supplies. On 1 November, the Japanese *1st Division*, coming from Shanghai on troop transports escorted by destroyers and coast defense vessels, reached Ormoc and went ashore with about 12,000 men and equipment. Unloading was virtually completed before the convoy was discovered. Within two weeks after A-Day, the Japanese had landed some 22,000 reinforcements.²¹

To deprive the Japanese of their main port of debarkation on Leyte, General Krueger decided to launch two converging drives against Ormoc. X Corps was to move south through the Ormoc Valley; XXIV Corps was to advance northwards from Baybay. At the conclusion of this drive the Japanese remaining on Leyte would be forced to move into the mountains west of the Ormoc Valley, where effective organized resistance was all but impossible. In the XXIV Corps area, the 96th Infantry Division was to eliminate about 6,000 Japanese in the hills west of Dagami during the time that the 7th Infantry Division was consolidating its gains between Abuyog and Baybay.

²¹ Sixth Army Report of Leyte Operation, pp. 34–40, as cited in Craven and Cate, *The Pacific*, p. 377.

Meanwhile, the Japanese continued to pour reinforcements into Leyte. In fact, “the idea of a mobile counterlanding force to reinforce the invaded area, had been an integral part of the Japanese Sho plan.”²² Between 23 October and 11 December 1944, the Japanese landed substantial reinforcements in nine echelons, until a total of some 30,000 men had gone ashore.²³ At the same time, strong enemy aircraft reinforcements arrived from Formosa. As November came to a close, the Japanese resistance on Leyte stiffened, aided by heavy rainfall, which impeded the progress of the Sixth Army’s mechanized equipment. By mid-November it had become clear to both opponents that the struggle for Leyte would be long and costly; the idea of an easy victory for either opponent had vanished once and for all.

In an attempt to gain the initiative, the Japanese resorted to some unorthodox tactics. During the early hours of 27 November, three enemy transport aircraft came in low over Leyte Gulf. The aircraft made no attempt to black out and had all their lights on. When one of the planes crash-landed just 25 yards offshore near the bivouac of an amphibian tractor battalion, one of the guards jumped on the wing to offer assistance. Hand-grenade throwing Japanese emerging from the plane quickly convinced the guard that his help was not wanted. Two of the enemy were subsequently killed by small arms fire. Three others vanished into a swamp, where about a dozen others soon joined them.

²² USSBS, *Pacific Campaigns*, p. 287.

²³ *Ibid.*

The second air transport crashed while attempting to land on Buri airstrip and all of the occupants were killed. The third airplane crash-landed north of Abuyog across a small river from a bivouac area occupied by troops of the 11th Airborne Division. According to a history of that division:

An antiaircraft machine gun crew, which outfit is forgotten now, was in position on the alert for enemy aircraft. When the plane landed and came to a halt, they called across the small river: "Need any help?" "No, everything OK," someone yelled back, and the machine gun crew went back to watching the skies for enemy aircraft.²⁴

The presence of stronger Japanese reinforcements on Leyte soon had an effect on the tactical situation of the XXIV Corps Artillery, particularly those units stationed in the Burauen area, where three out of the four airfields on Leyte were situated. During the early morning of 6 December, an estimated 100 Japanese infiltrated the area adjacent to Headquarters Battery, 287th Observation Battalion, in an apparent attempt to advance towards Buri airfield. Two days were to pass before the enemy infiltrators were eliminated.

At dusk on 6 December, enemy planes bombed Buri airfield, which harbored the corps artillery air sections totaling 30 officers and men, and laid a heavy smoke screen over the surrounding area. Shortly after the bombing, a force of about 150 Japanese parachuted into the vicinity of the field. The Marines of the air sections were armed with individual weapons and two ma-

chine guns, one of which had been salvaged from a wrecked plane. In the course of the morning, enemy attacks gradually drove friendly troops from their positions. As these men fell back on the position held by the Corps Artillery air sections, an additional 175 anti-aircraft gun crews and service troops were hastily organized for defense by Marine Captain Eugene S. Roane, Jr., Assistant Corps Artillery S-2 and Air Observer, who was the senior officer present at the time of the Japanese attack.

Fighting for Buri airfield continued until 8 December. During the afternoon of that day, the antiaircraft personnel comprising part of the defensive force were ordered off the field. Having lost a large segment of their strength by this reshuffling of troops, the Marines were forced to pull back to the infantry perimeter. While fighting for the airfield was in progress, liaison pilots and observers from corps artillery repeatedly took off from and landed on the field under fire to evacuate wounded and bring in supplies and ammunition. All planes were hit by enemy small arms fire, which wounded one pilot and a mechanic. On 9 December the remaining personnel of the Corps Artillery Air Section were evacuated from Buri airfield.²⁵

Some of the enemy paratroops dropped on 6 December landed near the position of the 5th 155mm Howitzer Battalion. For the next four days and nights, Marines of the battalion found themselves dodging enemy bullets and hand grenades. The tactics employed

²⁴ Maj Edward M. Flanagan, Jr., *The Angels, A History of the 11th Airborne Division, 1943-1946* (Washington, D. C., 1948), p. 34.

²⁵ VAC Arty SAR, p. 9.

by the Japanese consisted of remaining inactive during the day and emerging at night to lob grenades into the battery positions. For the most part such attacks were sporadic, lasting no more than one hour at a time and repeated four to five times each night. At this particular time, most of the equipment and men were at the beach preparing to load on board ship to depart Leyte, and those Marines who remained to encounter the enemy paratroops were members of cleanup details consisting of about 50-75 men whose nights were made even more unpleasant by the hard rain which filled the foxholes with cold water. Fortunately for the Marines, it was possible to trace the grenade trajectory by the glow of the fuze, enabling them to fire at the source. Before the action ended, the artillerymen had killed 23 of the Japanese and accounted for one more who preferred to commit suicide.²⁶ The remaining Japanese were driven from Buri airfield on 10 December.

At 0800 on 11 December, following the arrival of the XXIV Corps Artillery from Saipan, the V Amphibious Corps Artillery was relieved of all missions in support of the XXIV Corps. The 5th and 11th Battalions and Headquarters Battery sailed from Leyte on 13 December for Guam. General Bourke departed from the island by air for Guam on the same day.²⁷ During their attachment to XXIV Corps, the Marine artillerymen lost 2 officers and 7 enlisted men killed, 3 officers and 31 enlisted men wounded in action, and 1 Marine missing.²⁸

Though the battle for Leyte was still far from over, the Marine artillerymen had contributed their share to ultimate victory.

ENTER MARINE AIR²⁹

During the early days of the Leyte operation, the Navy furnished all air support for the U. S. ground troops. The Battle for Leyte Gulf made it necessary for the escort carriers to use all available aircraft for offensive and defensive missions. Incessant rains and mud on Leyte impeded the development of airfields. The advent of Japanese suicide attacks³⁰ against American ships in Leyte Gulf caused losses that badly hurt the Navy escort groups.

Alien as the spirit of self-destruction may appear to Occidental eyes, the idea of sacrificing an airplane and pilot to destroy an Allied ship was effective and entirely practical from the Japanese point of view. Overwhelming American superiority in both personnel and materiel forced the Japanese to adopt this step. The effectiveness of *kamikaze* attacks in Leyte Gulf was further increased by American difficulties with shore-based radar, which left supporting units in the Gulf exposed to increasing threat of suicide attack.³¹ Among the many statements made during and after World War II on the subject of the *kamikaze*, perhaps the most poignant one came from a Navy commander, who philosophized as follows:

²⁹ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from MAG-12 WarDs, Nov-Dec44.

³⁰ Designated as *Kamikaze* in Japanese naval terminology and called *Tokko* by the Japanese Army.

³¹ USSBS, *Pacific Campaigns*, p. 286.

²⁶ 5th 155mm HowBn SAR, 6-10Dec44.

²⁷ BGen Thomas E. Bourke ltr to CMC, dtd 28Dec44, Encl to VAC Arty SAR.

²⁸ VAC Arty OpRpt, p. 16.

Every time one country gets something, another soon has it. One country gets radar, but soon all have it. One gets a new type of engine or plane, then another gets it. But the Japs have got the *kamikaze* boys, and nobody else is going to get that, because nobody else is built that way.³³

Despite the initial success of the Japanese ramming attacks and the losses they were able to inflict on American shipping at Leyte, such bizarre tactics could not offset American superiority, nor could they accomplish a turning of the tide in the strategical situation. No other tactic could have illuminated more clearly the weakness of the Japanese Air Force. A dispassionate and objective analysis of the overall impact of the *kamikaze* tactic came to the conclusion that with the first *kamikaze* attack:

...the Japanese may be said to have abandoned the air war; from this time on they made little attempt at reviving their air force. Macabre, effective, supremely practical under the circumstances, supported and stimulated by a powerful propaganda campaign, the special attack became virtually the sole method used in opposing the United States striking and amphibious forces, and these ships the sole objectives.³⁴

The exploits of Japanese *kamikaze* pilots could not change the fact that Japanese air operations in the Philippines were beset by severe difficulties. Foremost among these was the speed employed by the American invasion forces in seizing the Japanese airfields on Leyte. Even though the numerical weakness of American land-based aircraft initially permitted the Japanese to land substantial reinforcements, the

arrival of additional aircraft and the completion of airfields on the island were bound to shift the balance in favor of the Americans. For the Japanese, there was a marked increase in the number of crippled aircraft because of the poor state of Japanese airfields in the Philippines. Only about 10 Japanese aircraft reached the battle zone towards the end of October. At that time the daily attrition rate was 20–25 aircraft.³⁴ It became impossible for Japanese aircraft production to catch up with the losses.

Throughout November, the fast carriers hit Luzon in order to reduce the heavy flow of Japanese aircraft reinforcements that were being sent to the Philippines from Formosa. No fewer than 700 enemy aircraft and 134,000 tons of Japanese shipping were destroyed in this manner.³⁵ The Japanese Air Force was unable to compensate for such heavy losses. In the words of the former Military Secretary to the Japanese Minister of War:

Aerial operations in the Philippines were conducted in the form of an aircraft-replacement race, instead of combat between hostile aircraft carriers. At the time, moreover, there existed such a tremendous difference in the air-replacement capabilities of the Japanese and the Americans that there was scant opportunity for the former to win the decisive battle for Leyte—even if various other conditions were temporarily favorable.³⁶

During the initial phase of the Leyte campaign, the Japanese Air Force had the upper hand. FEAF aircraft were too few in numbers to do more than

³³ Cdr John Thach, quoted in Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*, p. 273.

³⁴ USSBS, *Pacific Campaigns*, p. 286.

³⁵ Hayashi and Coox, *Kōgun*, p. 127.

³⁶ USSBS, *Pacific Campaigns*, p. 287.

³⁷ Hayashi and Coox, *Kōgun*, p. 127.

provide a defense against enemy air attacks. Tacloban was the only operational strip on Leyte, though the Dulag airfield was used on occasion for emergency landings. Before the first Army Air Force planes could land at Tacloban on 27 October, 2,500 feet of steel matting had to be laid in two days. The advent of the rainy season and the arrival of three typhoons, accompanied by heavy rains, further complicated airfield construction. As a result, the arrival of sorely needed light and medium bombers had to be postponed repeatedly. On several occasions engineers engaged in airfield construction had to be diverted to road maintenance.

By the end of November, all of Leyte except the Ormoc Bay area and the northwest coast of the island was in American hands. The continuous flow of Japanese reinforcements threatened to cause a military stalemate, even though Sixth Army had seven divisions ashore and the Navy had driven the Japanese fleet from the waters surrounding Leyte. The Tacloban airstrip received unwelcome attention by the Japanese, who made several determined attempts to render the strip useless for the Americans. On 4 November, 35 enemy aircraft raided the airfield, killing 4 men, wounding 30, and destroying 2 P-38s and damaging 39 others.³⁷ Two *kamikazes* crashed into two air transports bringing in the ground echelon of a bombardment group, killing 92 men and wounding 156 others. Additional American aircraft at the Tacloban field fell victim to Japanese air attacks later in the month.

Even though Allied air power had begun to count by mid-November and an increasing number of Japanese ships engaged in shuttling reinforcements to Leyte were sent to the bottom, air operations on Leyte continued to be hamstrung by the lack of base facilities. "FEAF could meet the demand for planes and combat crews, but they could not operate without surfaced strips. By 30 November, only 182 fighters were on Leyte, and an average of only 111 had been operational daily during the preceding week."³⁸

No immediate relief for the shortage of airfields on Leyte was in sight. Facilities completed at Bayug and Buri were closed down by bad weather shortly after they had become operational; poor drainage, faulty soil bases, and poor access roads finally forced Fifth Air Force to abandon Buri and San Pablo airstrips. Construction of an all-weather airfield at Tanauan between Tacloban and Dulag began during the latter part of November, but until completion of this strip the lack of air facilities on Leyte was bound to reduce the effectiveness of American air power. Fifth Air Force expended its strength in a struggle to gain air superiority; the insufficient number of aircraft available on Leyte precluded the employment of aircraft for close support missions until late in the campaign.

By 27 November, Admiral Kinkaid had become increasingly restive under the continued *kamikaze* attacks, which continued to exact a heavy toll among American ships. Admiral Halsey's carriers had already stayed in the Philippines almost a month longer than had

³⁷ Craven and Cate, *The Pacific*, pp. 374-375.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 383.

been planned and the Admiral itched for action against the Japanese mainland. General MacArthur was dissatisfied with the air defense of Leyte and suggested to Admiral Nimitz an exchange of night fighter squadrons. The Marine night fighters were better able to cope with the Japanese night bombers, which were too fast for the P-61 Black Widow fighter plane, built by Northrop, used by the Army night fighter squadron on Leyte. VMF(N)-541 was to be shifted from Peleliu to Leyte, relieving a Fifth Air Force squadron that in turn was to move to the Palaus.

For General Mitchell's Marine aviators, the old adage that "all good things come in bunches" was about to prove true. Hardly had the word of VMF(N)-541's transfer to Leyte been passed when Admiral Halsey intervened in order to get the Marine aviators more fully committed in the Philippines. The Admiral described this development in the following words:

I had under my command in the South Pacific a Marine Air Group which had proved its versatility in everything from fighting to blasting enemy vessels. I knew that this group was now under MacArthur's command, and I knew, too, without understanding why, that when Kenney was not keeping it idle, he was assigning it to missions far below its capacity. Kinkaid's complaint of insufficient air cover prompted me to take a step which was more than a liberty; to a man of meaner spirit than MacArthur's, it would have seemed an impertinence. I called these Marines to his attention. He ordered them forward, and within twenty-four hours of their arrival, they had justified my recommendation.³⁹

³⁹ Halsey and Bryan, *Admiral Halsey's Story*, p. 231.

Admiral Halsey's recommendation to General MacArthur bore immediate fruit. As November drew to a close, VMF(N)-541 on Peleliu and four Marine fighter squadrons of MAG-12 in the Solomons stood ready to move to Leyte when the word was received.

Marine Night Fighter Squadron 541 was placed on standby alert for departure to Leyte on 28 November. Under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Peter D. Lambrecht, the squadron had spent over two months on Peleliu. Equipped with Grumman "Hellcats," more formally known as F6Fs, the squadron specialized in night intercept operations. To this end, the "Hellcats" were equipped with special radar devices, and all of the pilots had received thorough training in the squadron specialty.

Three days later, General Mitchell ordered Marine Aircraft Group 12 (MAG-12), commanded by Colonel William A. Willis, to move four of its fighter squadrons, VMF-115, -211, -218, and -313 to Tacloban by 3 December for duty with the Fifth Air Force.⁴⁰ To expedite the movement, General Mitchell requested Fifth Air Force to make C-47 transports available to airlift men and materiel of the ground echelons to Tacloban. This request was granted; similarly, the Seventh Fleet promised logistic support for the ground echelon at its destination.

Early on 2 December, 85 Corsairs from MAG-12, escorted by PBJs from

⁴⁰ MAG-12 WarDs, Nov-Dec44. At this time VMF-115 was commanded by Maj John H. King, Jr; VMF-211 by Maj Stanislaus J. Witomski; VMF-218 by Maj Robert T. Kingsbury III; and VMF-313 by Maj Philip R. White.

MAG-61, left the Solomons for Leyte. After refuelling at Hollandia and other islands, 82 fighters reached Peleliu on 3 December, only a few hours after VMF(N)-541 had left for Tacloban. The remainder, having developed mechanical trouble, required repairs before they could catch up with the main flight. The night fighters of VMF(N)-541 flew the 600 miles from Peleliu to Leyte without incident and landed at Tacloban during the morning of 3 December; in the course of the afternoon, 66 Corsairs and 9 escorting patrol bombers touched down on the same airstrip; 16 Corsairs had remained at Peleliu with mechanical troubles, none of them serious.⁴¹

Marine aviators had come to the Philippines in strength to fly cover for convoys, execute fighter-bomber strikes against enemy shipping in Visayan waters and ground installations on southern Luzon, and fly ground support missions on Leyte. Above all, they helped to deny the ports of western Leyte to the enemy during his desperate attempts to reinforce his troops and made him pay dearly for attempting to run the aerial blockade.

CORSAIRS AND HELLCATS ON LEYTE⁴²

Marine aviators arriving at Tacloban were quick to discover that facilities at

the airfield left something to be desired. One author gave the following graphic description:

Tacloban strip was now the none-too-happy base of 87 Marine planes. Although the invasion had taken place six weeks before the first Marine flyers got there, work on the airfield had progressed but little. Severe storms lashed the east coast of Leyte during the October-January northeast monsoon, and stories about the mud at Tacloban are still legendary.⁴³

One of the aviators of MAG-12 has described the arrival of the Air Group as being attended "by some of the worst conditions of overcrowding, lack of space, and inadequate operational facilities, not even excluding Guadalcanal in August of 1942."⁴⁴

On the day of their arrival at Tacloban, six Hellcats of VMF(N)-541 flew their first mission in the Philippines by covering PT boats in Surigao Strait and providing air cover over Ormoc Bay. Bad weather on 4 December precluded flight operations; instead, Marine aviation personnel set up and improved the camp site located about 300 yards west of the southern end of the Tacloban strip.

Marine pilots in the Philippines drew their first blood on 5 December, when a Hellcat on predawn patrol between Bohol Island and southern Leyte shot down an enemy fighter. Not to be outdone by the nightfighters, the Corsair pilots also claimed a Japanese fighter on the same day.

⁴¹ MAG-12 WarD, Dec44.

⁴² Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: Dec44 WarDs of MAG-12, VMF-115, VMF-211, VMF-218, VMF-313; Boggs, *Marines in the Philippines*; *Philippines Comment File*; Smith, *The Approach to the Philippines*; Morison, *Leyte*; Craven and Cate, *The Pacific*; Halsey and Bryan, *Admiral Halsey's Story*; Cannon, *Leyte*.

⁴³ Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*, p. 276.

⁴⁴ Maj Roy T. Spurlock ltr to CMC, dtd 7Feb51, in *Philippines Comment File*, hereafter *Spurlock ltr*.

This was only the beginning of what was to prove an exciting, demanding, and fruitful operation for the Marine aviators. For the remainder of the month, the biggest assignment for the nightfighters, alternately known as the "Bateye Squadron," was to intercept Japanese aircraft that preferred to execute raids at dusk, dawn, and during the night. Some difficulty was experienced initially because the ground controllers guiding the night fighters were Army personnel using procedures that differed from those followed by Marine controllers, though in time coordination improved. Crowded conditions at Tacloban and deficiencies in radar coverage and performance did not make the task of the Hellcat pilots easier.

The day-fighter squadrons of MAG-12 soon discovered that the mission they had so thoroughly trained for—that of close support for ground troops—did not materialize at once. There were daily missions of raiding enemy airfields, providing air cover for friendly convoys, rescues, and attacks against Japanese troops and communications. The most important contribution of Marine fighters in the Leyte operation resulted from the tactical situation, which made it necessary for Marine pilots to play an active part in stemming the steady enemy flow of reinforcements to Leyte by attacking Japanese ships.

Marine fighters of VMF-211 struck their first blow against Japanese shipping on the morning of 7 December, when a dozen Corsairs went out in search of seven Japanese vessels reportedly en route to Ormoc Bay. By the time the Corsairs spotted the ships

at anchor at San Isidro Harbor, Japanese fighters were flying cover for the convoys. Eight Marine fighters engaged the Japanese aircraft; four Corsairs went after the enemy ships and damaged one destroyer, which caught fire and subsequently ran aground. In the course of this action, three Corsairs were shot down.

The action continued during the afternoon, when Corsairs of VMF-211, -218, and -313 with Army fighters as escorts, returned to San Isidro and sank three cargo ships, a troop transport, and a destroyer. While this action was in progress, Ormoc Bay became a hotbed of activity for both belligerents, for a convoy carrying the Army 77th Infantry Division was approaching to land the division several miles south of Ormoc.

That plenty of air action resulted from the attempts of both Americans and Japanese to put troops ashore near Ormoc on the same day is not surprising. Nor could it be expected that the Japanese would stand by idly as the American convoy approached the shores of Leyte. Beginning at 0820, and practically without interruption, Japanese air attacks hit the American ships in Ormoc Bay. Fifth Air Force aircraft did all they could to protect the friendly vessels, but more than once enemy aircraft broke through this cover and a curtain of antiaircraft fire put up by the ships. The enemy air attacks continued for more than nine hours and included numerous *kamikaze* runs that found their mark. A destroyer and high-speed transport were so badly damaged that they subsequently had to be sunk by gunfire.⁴⁵ In addition, a

landing ship was hit near the beach and had to be abandoned, and a destroyer, an LST, and a high-speed transport were damaged.

On 11 December, the Japanese made a final attempt to reinforce their garrison on Leyte. In the course of the morning, a Japanese convoy of six cargo ships and transports and four destroyers and escorts was observed heading for Leyte. The four Marine dayfighter squadrons put 27 Corsairs into the air, which intercepted the Japanese ships about 40 miles west of Panay Island. Each plane carried a 1,000 pound bomb armed with a 4-5 second delay fuze. Pilots of VMF-313, commanded by Major Joe H. McGlothlin, dive-bombed a troop transport, scoring a hit amidships with two bombs. VMF-115, led by Major John H. King, scored a hit on a cargo ship, setting it on fire. The eight Corsairs from VMF-211 in the group did not score any direct hits on the convoy but instead became embroiled in a dogfight with more than a dozen enemy fighters and downed four of them. During the bombing run, the Corsairs drew heavy anti-aircraft fire, which was intense but inaccurate. Pilots of VMF-218 did not have a chance to observe the results of their bombing because they suddenly found themselves under attack by seven enemy fighters. In a running fight, two of the Japanese fighters were downed; another one disappeared in a cloudbank, trailing black smoke. When the action ended, the score was two enemy ships severely damaged and six aircraft downed, with one more probable.

During the afternoon of 11 December, 30 additional Marine aircraft, accompanied by Army P-40s, attacked the same convoy. Pilots of VMF-313 sank one large troop transport, a cargo vessel, and a destroyer and set two freighters on fire, at a cost of four Corsairs hit by anti-aircraft fire, two of which were badly damaged. VMF-211 sank two destroyers and a troop transport at a cost of two aircraft. Aviators of VMF-115 scored a direct hit on a large cargo ship and left another listing and burning, at the cost of two aircraft. VMF-218 set the remaining destroyer on fire and scored hits on a large troop transport with unobserved results; one Corsair was lost in that operation.

Throughout the action, Japanese anti-aircraft fire was unusually intense. Equally noteworthy were the tactics employed by the Marine pilots to counter it. While the Army aircraft released their bombs at altitudes between 2,000 and 10,000 feet, the Corsairs attacked at masthead level. One of the Marine pilots, speaking of the P-40s, somewhat caustically remarked:

They accomplished nothing except to make interesting splashes in the water and wake up the Japs. AA immediately became very intense. As the last Army bombs were falling our Corsairs were in position and coming in fast and low. The Japs never saw us coming until we started to shoot (we received no fire until past the screening destroyers).⁴⁶

Elsewhere off Leyte, the situation was reversed, and Corsairs of MAG-12 found themselves protecting American

⁴⁶ Cannon, *Leyte*, p. 283.

⁴⁶ Capt Rolfe T. Blanchard ltr to CMC, n.d., in *Philippines Comment File*, hereafter *Blanchard ltr*.

ships in Leyte Gulf from enemy air attacks. During the afternoon of 11 December, 4 Corsairs of VMF-313 spotted 16 Japanese fighters, carrying 500-pound bombs under each wing, headed for an American convoy passing through Surigao Straits. The Marine aviators, diving through friendly anti-aircraft fire, engaged the enemy fighters, shot down five, and drove the remainder from the area, but not before two Japanese suicide planes had sunk a destroyer. Even though the timely intervention of the Corsairs prevented far greater damage to the convoy, the Marine aircraft received considerable damage from friendly anti-aircraft fire.⁴⁷

While the Corsairs of the Marine day-fighter squadrons were busy attacking Japanese ships, protecting American shipping, and patrolling, the Hellcats of VMF(N)-541 also did their share of fighting. Early on 12 December, the nightfighters intercepted a number of unidentified aircraft on their radar screens while flying cover for a convoy near Ormoc Bay. Just as a Japanese flight of 33 torpedo bombers, dive bombers, and fighters approached the American convoy, the Hellcats intercepted them and broke up the formation. Even though some of the enemy bombers inevitably got through to the target, the outnumbered Marine aviators kept the enemy off balance. As a result, all of the enemy bombs missed the convoy. During the battle it became evident that the Japanese evaded air combat whenever possible, though the Marines were greatly outnumbered.

When the battle ended, the night fighters of VMF(N)-541 had destroyed 11 enemy aircraft and damaged 1, with no losses to themselves.⁴⁸

War is not only the realm of suffering, as Clausewitz has put it, but is equally the sphere of the unexpected. Frequently, the perversity of weather or terrain can do greater harm than enemy action. For MAG-12, the pre-dawn hours of 13 December spelled tragedy. At 0530, under conditions of extremely poor visibility, six Corsairs of VMF-313, accompanied by two Hellcats, set out on a mission to escort a friendly convoy. Because of bad weather and poor runway conditions at the Tacloban airfield, one of the Corsairs crashed during takeoff. In a tragic sequence of events, the plane smashed into a jeep, injuring its two occupants, one of whom was the group intelligence officer, who lost his left arm and suffered numerous other injuries. With scarcely diminished force, the plane hit an ambulance and a crash truck in front of the operations building, killing four men. The flaming inferno spread by the wrecked aircraft and vehicles prevented the remainder of the flight from taking off.⁴⁹

Shortly afterwards, another Corsair, which had previously taken off crashed between Leyte and Samar for undetermined reasons. The pilot, in attempting to bail out, was struck in the face by the vertical stabilizer and killed. Far luckier was the pilot of one of the Corsairs who, following another strike against enemy shipping, was last re-

⁴⁷ MAG-12 WarD, Dec44.

⁴⁸ VMF(N)-541 WarD, Dec44.

⁴⁹ MAG-12 WarD, Dec44.

ported attempting a water landing. When no further word from him was received, he was initially presumed missing in action. Days later, after an odyssey that included ditching in the water, rescue by natives who thought he might be a German, and a feast on candy bars, whose wrappers bore the legend "I shall return," the pilot made it back to Tacloban, not much the worse for wear.⁵⁰

Before the day was over, the 13th lived up to its reputation in yet another way. Even though 35 Corsairs of MAG-12 covered a friendly invasion convoy bound for Mindoro Island, a Japanese suicide plane arrived over the convoy at a time when the Corsairs were not on duty. The *kamikaze* selected none other than the flagship *Nashville* as his victim. The plane crashed into the ship, killing 129, including the chiefs of staff of both the naval force and the ground force commander, as well as the commanding officer of the 310th Bombardment Wing. In addition, four men were missing in action. Twenty-eight of the 41 Marines in the ship's detachment perished in the disaster.

Better days were to follow. The invasion of Mindoro Island, located just south of Luzon and 200 miles northwest of Leyte, promised to secure better airfields without the mud, which had so greatly plagued ground troops and aviators alike. At the same time, construction of a new airfield at Tanauan, about 45 miles west of Tacloban, promised to provide some relief for the overcrowding that had characterized MAG-

12 operations at Tacloban. Though Japanese air power over Luzon remained strong, enemy air strength over Leyte was rapidly diminishing by mid-December. During the latter half of that month, ground operations on Leyte went into their final phase. Corsairs and Hellcats met fewer and fewer of their opponents in aerial combat until enemy resistance in the air all but ceased. For the Marine aviators on Leyte, the demise of the Japanese air strength did not mean the end of a mission but merely a change in emphasis. The type of operation for which they had been trained so zealously before coming to the Philippines, the support of ground troops, still had to be put into practice.

GROUND SUPPORT MISSIONS AND CLOSING PHASE⁵¹

Marine pilots on Leyte flew their first ground support missions on 10 December, when they struck at enemy bivouac areas at Ormoc and San Isidro on the west coast of the island. The results of both raids were generally unobserved, though fires subsequently swept the target areas. On 17 and 19 December, Corsairs again hit Japanese ground targets. On these occasions, 12 aircraft of MAG-12 bombed and strafed Japanese supply installations at Palompon, on the northwest coast of Leyte.⁵² For the remainder of the month, Japanese airfields on Negros and Panay Is-

⁵⁰ Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*, pp. 281-282.

⁵¹ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: MAG-12 WarD, Dec44; VMF(N)-541 WarDs, Dec44-Jan45; Boggs, *Marines in the Philippines*; *Philippines Comment File*.

⁵² MAG-12 WarD, Dec44.

lands as well as on Mindanao and Luzon became primary targets of the Marine aviators.

Even though such attacks ultimately contributed to Japanese demoralization and defeat in the Philippines, this type of air support was a far cry from the close support tactics for which the Marines had trained. At no time during the Leyte operation did MAG-12 ever receive an assignment commensurate with its capabilities of giving close air support to ground troops. The Joint Assault Signal Companies, equipped with air-ground signal communication facilities, were not used for direct air-ground control. Pilots were briefed on their missions prior to takeoff and targets assigned on the day preceding an air strike. Once the flight became airborne, no further control was exercised from the ground.

It must be recalled that Marine aviation on Leyte came under the overall command of the Fifth Air Force and for this reason operated under the procedures and guidelines set forth by the AAF. Even though Marine and Army Air Forces pilots flew numerous missions over Leyte together, important differences in doctrine and training continually cropped up. Army aircraft on bombing missions, when subjected to enemy attack, tended to jettison their bombs and engage the enemy fighters. In so doing, they tended to abandon their primary mission; the Corsair pilots, on the other hand, kept their bombs and continued on despite enemy interference. As one of the Marine aviators on Leyte put it:

The reason the Marine air strikes against enemy shipping were markedly more successful than the Army strikes

was due simply to more thorough briefing and planning and vastly better air discipline.

The thought was instilled in the minds of all Marine pilots that the assigned mission came first. Time after time Marine flights on combat air patrol would give up chasing bogeys who escaped from their assigned patrol area, rather than leave their assigned area, even though they could hear Army patrols on the same type of mission, merrily chasing Japs all over the Visayan Sea.⁵³

For the remainder of December 1944 the Corsairs of MAG-12, in close teamwork with two Army fighter groups, bombed a series of villages on Luzon and attacked railway bridges, trains, and other railroad facilities. On Leyte, the fate of the Japanese was sealed when, on 25 December, elements of the Army's 77th Infantry Division went ashore at Palompon and seized the last port on Leyte under Japanese control. The enemy units remaining on Leyte were now completely cut off without any further hope of receiving reinforcements or evacuating the island. In their customary style, the Japanese fought on for another five months in a battle to the bitter end, but the die was cast. On 26 December, operations on Leyte passed into the hands of the Eighth Army, commanded by Lieutenant General Robert L. Eichelberger. The Sixth Army now prepared for the next vital step in the liberation of the Philippines, the invasion of Luzon, scheduled for 9 January 1945.

For the fighter squadrons of MAG-12, the latter part of December brought at least some relief from the squalid conditions under which they had op-

⁵³ *Ibid.*

erated at crowded Tacloban airfield. Beginning on 21 December, and continuing through the 27th, the four day-fighter squadrons moved from Tacloban to the newly completed airstrip at Tanauan. This move once and for all brought to an end the congestion and mud that had been the trademark of Tacloban. The runway at Tanauan consisted of Marston matting, which had been placed over sand; despite the noisy vibration of the metal, landings were considerably safer than they had been at Tacloban.

As 1944 drew to a close, the role that Marine aviation was destined to play in support of ground operations on Leyte, had been partly fulfilled. In less than four weeks of operations, the fighter pilots of MAG-12 had flown a total of 264 missions. They destroyed 22 enemy ships and accounted for a total of 40 enemy aircraft. The price paid by the Marines for their exploits during the Leyte operation was 9 pilots killed and 34 aircraft lost.⁵⁴

The night fighters of VMF(N)-541, during their stay on Leyte, also established a record worthy of mention. During the month of December, the squadron carried out 312 individual

combat flights, totalling 924 combat hours. When, on 11 January, the Hellcats returned to Peleliu, they had accounted for 22 aircraft destroyed in the air, 5 destroyed on the ground, plus several probables. The night fighters had also destroyed four small surface craft loaded with enemy personnel.⁵⁵

For their performance on Leyte, the nightfighters received a Letter of Commendation from Fifth Air Force and V Fighter Command, praising the squadron for making "an important contribution to the control of the air that is now assured our forces."⁵⁶

As planning for General MacArthur's accelerated drive through the Philippines gained momentum, additional Marine aviation units stood poised to play their part in the liberation of the islands. For the enemy, the damage inflicted by Marine squadrons during the Leyte campaign was only a forerunner of what was to follow. The full impetus of the Marine doctrine of close support for the ground forces was yet to be tested in battle. The day for this test was fast approaching.

⁵⁵ VMF(N)-541 WarD, Dec44-Jan45.

⁵⁶ Ltr of Commendation, BGen Paul D. Wurt-smith, CG, V Fighter Cmd., n.d., as shown in VMF(N)-541 WarD, Dec44-Jan45, pp. 16-17.

⁵⁴ MAG-12 WarD, Dec44.

The Luzon Campaign¹

Except for a prolonged mopping up operation, the Leyte campaign was completed on 26 December 1944. The next step in the liberation of the Philippine Islands, scheduled for 9 January, was the invasion of Luzon at Lingayen Gulf, about 150 miles north of Manila. The lack of air bases on Leyte had already made necessary a postponement of the Luzon operation, initially scheduled for 20 December. The need to build airstrips on Mindoro Island just south of Luzon, from which land based aircraft could support the invasion, contributed further to the delay.

In many respects, the plan advanced for the seizure of Luzon resembled that employed for Leyte. Once again, the Sixth Army was to execute the landings, supported by the Third Fleet. Allied Naval Forces, under the command of Admiral Kinkaid and Allied Air Forces under General Kenney were

to support the operation. In addition to the Fifth and Thirteenth Air Forces under SWPA, the Fourteenth Air Force in China and the Twentieth Air Force in the China-Burma-India Theater were to lend strategic support to SWPA operations in the Philippines. The immediate objective of the Luzon campaign was seizure of the plain of Central Luzon and Manila, the annihilation of Japanese forces on the island, and denial of the northern entrance to the South China Sea to the enemy.

As preparations for the Luzon invasion were going into full swing, additional Marine aviation units were en route from the Solomons to the Philippines, an indication of the expanded role that Marine aviation was to play in the liberation of the islands. As early as 7 December, General Mitchell had alerted MAG-14, then based in the Solomons, for movement to the Philippines. Under the command of Colonel Zebulon C. Hopkins, the group consisted of VMFs-212, -222, -223 and VMO-251, subsequently redesignated a fighter squadron.² For the remainder of December, despite the early alerting order, MAG-14 sat out the month in the Solomons, awaiting the conquest of Samar by the 1st Cavalry Division and

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this chapter is derived from: 1st MAW WarD, Dec44; VMF-212 WarDs, Oct44-Feb45; VMF-222 WarDs, Oct44-Mar45; USSBS, *Pacific Campaigns*; Robert Ross Smith, *Triumph in the Philippines—The War in the Pacific—U. S. Army in World War II* (Washington: OCMH, DA, 1963), hereafter Smith, *Triumph in the Philippines*; Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Liberation of the Philippines, Luzon, Mindanao, the Visayas, 1944–1945—History of United States Naval Operations in World War II*, v. XIII (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1959) hereafter Morison, *Liberation of the Philippines*.

² The names of squadron commanders during this time period have been included in the Marine Task Organization and Command List which forms an appendix to this volume.

the construction of an airstrip near the town of Guiuan on southeastern Samar. By the last week of December, the Seabees of the 61st and 93d Naval Construction Battalions had completed facilities at Guiuan to handle at least one squadron of MAG-14. On 30 December the flight echelon of VMO-251 departed Bougainville, and by way of Emirau, Owi, and Peleliu, reached Samar on 2 January. By mid-January, the remaining squadrons of MAG-14 had installed themselves at Guiuan, under conditions as primitive as those which MAG-12 had encountered on Leyte barely a month previously.

As 1944 neared its end, ground echelons of the squadrons of MAGs-24 and -32 were en route to yet unspecified objectives in the Philippines, though it appeared certain that their destination could be none other than Luzon. Following a Christmas service at Headquarters, General Mitchell made a brief speech to the assembled Wing Headquarters personnel. "His pronouncement that his Headquarters would be on its way to a forward area in a matter of weeks was enthusiastically received."³

Marine aviation based on Leyte was to play only a very limited role in support of the landings on Luzon. Two weeks prior to the assault on the main island and the days following the landings, Corsairs of MAG-12 struck at highway and railroad bridges in order to restrict enemy mobility and disrupt the Japanese transportation system. Because of frequent bad weather, the Corsairs occasionally were unable to

reach the objectives assigned to them and instead attacked such targets of opportunity as trains and vehicular traffic. Japanese air activity was negligible throughout this period and air-to-air combat occurred infrequently, with "the remaining operational Japanese aircraft being either so widely dispersed as to be unavailable on short notice, or else being held in reserve for suicide attacks against the most dangerous enemy, the expected approaching fleet."⁴

The approach of that fleet was not a figment of the enemy's imagination, for on 3 January the minesweeping, shore bombardment, and escort carrier groups headed north through the Sulu Sea toward Lingayen Gulf. At the same time that the Seventh Fleet was departing from Leyte Gulf, the fast carriers of Halsey's Third Fleet struck hard at Formosa and the Ryukyus in order to forestall any Japanese attempt to reinforce the Luzon garrison. These air strikes, in which VMFs-124 and -213 from the carrier *Essex* participated, resulted in the destruction of over 100 enemy aircraft, despite extensive Japanese attempts at dispersal and camouflage.⁵

As the invasion fleet headed for Luzon, the officers and men on board the transports and escort ships were under no delusions as to the enemy's strength. In mid-December, a SWPA intelligence

⁴ USSBS, *Pacific Campaigns*, p. 288.

⁵ For a detailed account of Marine aviators on carriers, see Benis M. Frank and Henry I. Shaw, Jr., *Victory and Occupation—History of U. S. Marine Corps Operations in World War II*, v. V (Washington: HistBr, G-3 Div, HQMC, 1969), Part III, Chap 2, section entitled "Marine Air on Carriers," *passim*.

³ 1st MAW WarD, Dec44.

estimate had identified a tank division, five infantry divisions, six independent mixed brigades, and two separate infantry regiments on Luzon. By the end of the month, MacArthur's intelligence estimate figured enemy strength at a total of 152,000 troops of all categories. The Japanese were expected to commit all available air strength against the Allied invasion fleet and against any beachhead that might be established on Luzon. Japanese air strength in the Philippines was estimated at 400-500 aircraft, most of them stationed on Luzon.

As the main body of the Luzon Attack Force moved out of Leyte Gulf, the huge convoy posed a challenge which the enemy could not ignore. Beginning on 4 January, the remnants of the Philippine air garrison launched a series of *Kamikaze* attacks that soon began to take a toll of Allied ships. A suicide plane crashing into the escort carrier *Ommaney Bay* started a chain reaction of gasoline explosions which resulted in the abandonment and sinking of the ship. Another escort carrier barely escaped the same fate. On the following day the Japanese attacks against the convoy reached a new high when seven *Kamikazes* crashed into Allied ships and inflicted heavy damage on an escort carrier, two cruisers, and a destroyer, though none of these ships were sunk.⁶ On 6 January the fury of the enemy onslaught from the air reached a climax. One of the ships attacked was the USS *New Mexico*, which was carrying Colonel Clayton C. Jerome, who was charged with the direction of the Ma-

rine aviation effort on Luzon. As the officer helplessly watched, a *Kamikaze* crashed the bridge of the *New Mexico*, causing 30 fatalities, including the captain of the ship, and wounding 87 men.⁷ Before the day ended, an additional 15 Allied vessels were struck by suicide attacks. Even though only one ship sank as a result of this assault from the air, damage to the ships struck varied from moderate to extensive. Loss of personnel for 6 January alone totalled 167 killed and 502 wounded.⁸

As it became apparent to General MacArthur that land-based Allied aircraft could not keep all of the enemy airfields on Luzon neutralized, he diverted the fast carriers of the Third Fleet from Formosa and committed them against Japanese airfields on central Luzon. During a two-day period, on 6 and 7 January, repeated strikes by Navy and Marine carrier-based aircraft of the Third Fleet resulted in the destruction of more than 100 enemy aircraft.⁹

This blow, combined with strikes by land-based Allied aircraft on Leyte and Mindoro, broke the back of the massive Japanese onslaught against the invasion convoy, though this was not immediately apparent to American commanders, who were openly worried about the situation. From the Japanese point of view, the *Kamikaze* attacks were not as effective as had been hoped. Orders issued to the suicide pilots to concentrate their attacks on Allied transports were not followed, and com-

⁷ Morison, *Liberation of the Philippines*, p. 105.

⁸ *Ibid.*, App IV, p. 325.

⁹ USSBS, *Pacific Campaigns*, p. 289.

⁶ USSBS, *Pacific Campaigns*, p. 288.

bat vessels were instead singled out for attack. No one can estimate what would have happened, had the Japanese decided to rush air reinforcements from Formosa to Luzon. After 7 January the massive Japanese air effort tapered off, though:

...suiciders continued to appear in two's and three's for a week or more, but the battle in the Gulf, weird as it was and impressive as a testimony to the effectiveness of this form of attack, marked the end of the Japanese air forces in the Philippines. On 8 January the Naval Air Commander left for Singapore and his staff for Formosa, while the Commanding General of the 4th Air Army retired without his army to the hills of Luzon.¹⁰

Following in the wake of the harrowing voyage of the invasion convoy from Leyte Gulf to Lingayen, the Sixth Army landings of 9 January came as something of an anticlimax. Contrary to an earlier intelligence estimate at MacArthur's headquarters, which assumed that "a large and potentially dangerous concentration of Japanese forces held the region immediately east, northeast, and southeast of Lingayen Gulf,"¹¹ and deduced the presence of "at least two infantry divisions in position to defend Lingayen Gulf and environs,"¹² the landings were in fact unopposed. The X and XIV Corps went ashore and by nightfall had secured positions 3-5 miles inland along 15 miles of shoreline of southern Lingayen Gulf. (See Map 18).

The first Marines to go ashore on 10 January were Colonel Jerome, Lieutenant Colonel McCutcheon, operations

officer of MAG-24, and the colonel's driver, a Marine corporal. As the three Marines consolidated their "beach-head," they immediately set out in search of a strip which could be developed for the use of Marine aviation. A prewar field near Lingayen soon was so crowded with Army aircraft that selection of another strip was deemed desirable. An undeveloped site about 15 miles east of Lingayen appeared promising and was selected. Work on the strip had barely begun when, on 14 January, it became apparent that heavy graders had destroyed the thin crust of top soil and with it any chance of a solid undersurface. Colonel Jerome forthwith decided to abandon this site and instead selected an expanse of rice fields between Dagupan and Mangaldan about six miles to the southwest.

The selection of such a locale may at first glance appear a poor choice, though Colonel Jerome explained his action in the following words:

The Mangaldan strip was only a rice paddy. But if the hills of a rice paddy are knocked down without tearing out the roots they make a fine, flat surface which, when oiled, will serve as an airstrip about 12 inches above the water level. Rains would eventually raise the level of the muck but Colonel Jerome, an old Philippines hand from the twenties, figured three dry months were due and that was all he needed at Mangaldan, and recommended that the Army engineers build there.¹³

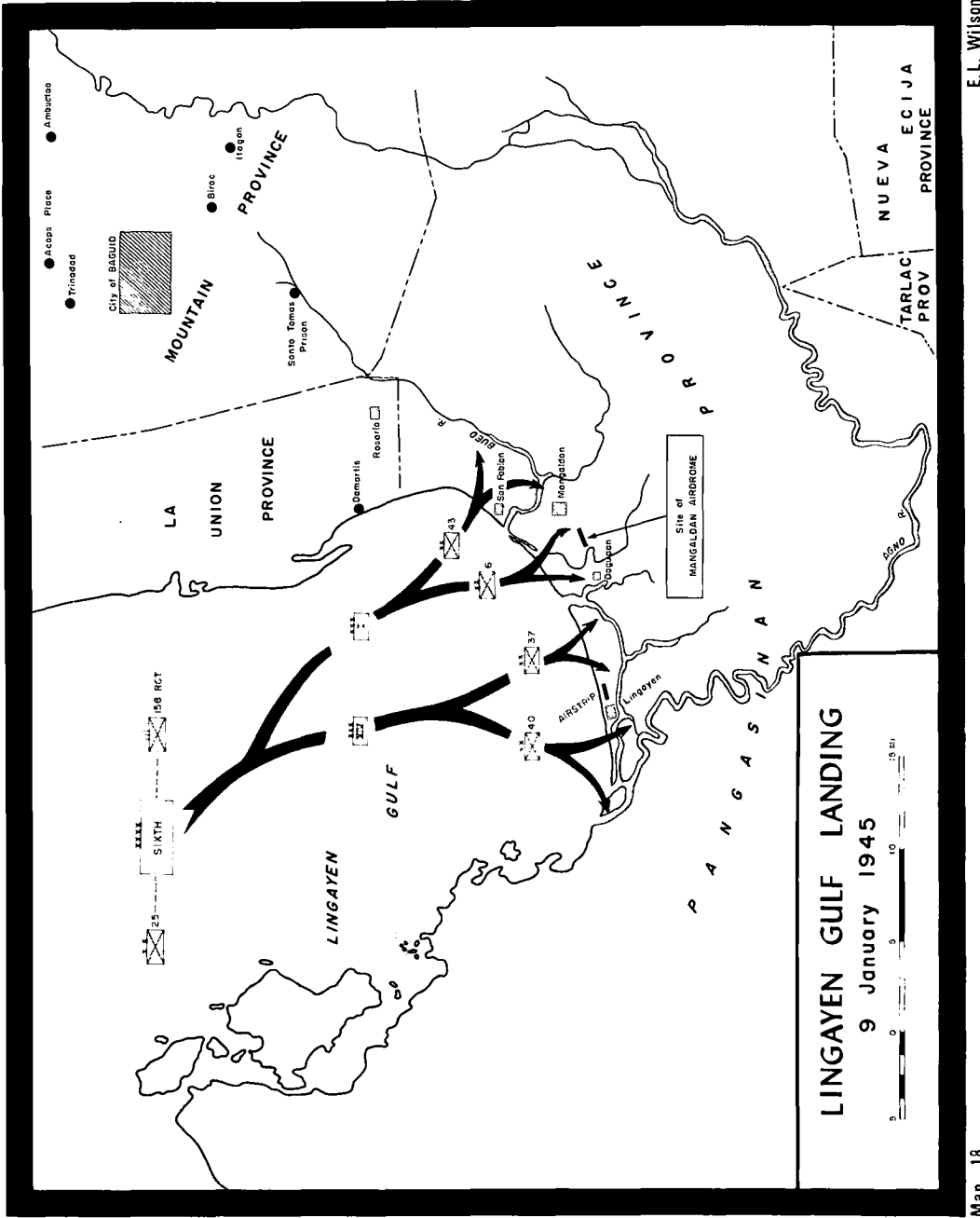
And build they did. On this occasion Army engineers employed light bulldozers and built a 6,500-foot east-west runway. While this work was in prog-

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Smith, *Triumph in the Philippines*, p. 27.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 28.

¹³ Colonel Clayton C. Jerome interview by Robert Sherrod, cited in Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*, p. 299.



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ress, Colonel Meyer, commanding officer of MAG-24, who had been in charge of the movement of the ground echelon, arrived at Lingayen with 14 pilots and 278 enlisted men. Before leaving for the Marine airstrip at Mangaldan, the Marines assisted Sixth Army in unloading and laying steel matting on the Lingayen airfield, which earned them a commendation from General Krueger, the Sixth Army commander. In mid-January additional men and supplies arrived at San Fabian, five miles north of Mangaldan, where all hands helped in constructing a camp and such other facilities as were required for full-scale operation of the strip.

As work on the Mangaldan airstrip neared completion, Colonel Jerome was designated Commander, Air Base, Mangaldan, and at the same time Commander, Marine Aircraft Groups, Dagupan (alternately abbreviated as MAGs-Mangaldan or MAGsDagupan). The first aircraft of MAGs-24 and -32 arrived at Mangaldan on 25 January, and combat operations began two days later. By the end of the month, 7 squadrons consisting of 472 officers and more than 3,000 men, and 174 Douglas Dauntless divebombers (SBDs) had reached Mangaldan. These squadrons were VMSBs-133, -142, -236, -241, -243, -244, and -341.

Before long, the splendid isolation in which the Marine aviation squadrons had hoped to operate was shattered with the arrival of 250 Army Air Forces planes which were also stationed at the field. The Army aircraft and personnel, as well as the Marines, were under the operational control of the 308th Bom-

bardment Wing of the Fifth Air Force. Colonel Jerome retained complete responsibility for the operation of the base and camp facilities, though he had not envisioned at the outset that before long Mangaldan airfield would become one of the busiest airports in the Western Pacific.

The arrival of two Marine air groups on Luzon and preparations for close support of Sixth Army ground troops on the island during most of January tended to overshadow the activities of MAGs-12 and -14 on Leyte and Samar. During the month of January, MAG-12 flew 306 missions, most of them in support of the Lingayen operation, while MAG-14 flew 1,590 sorties.¹⁴

Following completion of an improved landing strip at Tanauan on Leyte, operations of MAG-12 could be carried on under somewhat more normal conditions than had been the case on the overcrowded and treacherous Tacloban strip. For the Marines of MAG-14 stationed at Guiuan strip on southeastern Samar, problems grew from the lack of dispersal areas, adequate taxiing strips, and a field lighting system. These conditions inevitably resulted in a number of operational accidents; during January alone, MAG-14 lost 19 aircraft from this cause.

A spectacular accident, somewhat akin to the disaster that had struck at Tacloban on 13 December, marred operations at Guiuan on the morning of 24 January. During takeoff, a Corsair blew a tire, went out of control, and smashed into the revetment area shared

¹⁴ Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*, p. 289.

jointly by VMFs-212 and -222. Within a matter of seconds the tents housing the intelligence section, oxygen, and other supplies were completely destroyed. In a desperate effort to rescue the pilot, Marine aviation personnel rushed to the blazing wreck, reaching it just as the plane exploded. The explosion snuffed out the lives of 11 Marines, including the pilot; more than 50 Marines were injured, many of them seriously.¹⁵

The occurrence of such accidents was unavoidable under existing conditions. By late January, the military situation in the Philippines had radically changed in favor of the Allies. Massive *Kamikaze* attacks had hurt the huge Allied invasion fleet headed for Luzon, but had failed to interfere with the actual landings. In effect:

The submarine blockade, four months of carrier strikes overwhelming the Japanese air garrisons and destroying their merchant shipping, the destruction of their fleet in the great battle of October, and the attrition of their surviving air, of their transport, and other installations... made possible the invasion of Luzon under militarily ideal circumstances. Unopposed on the beaches, our troops went ashore to fight a campaign at their leisure against an enemy disorganized and demoralized, badly equipped and badly supplied, isolated beyond hope of remedy; a campaign in which every aircraft in the sky was friendly.¹⁶

A large number of the friendly aircraft sweeping ahead of and clearing the path for the advance of the Sixth Army were the dive bombers of the

Marine air groups based at Mangaldan, and a historical account of the Army sweep through Luzon also becomes the story of Marine aviation close support.

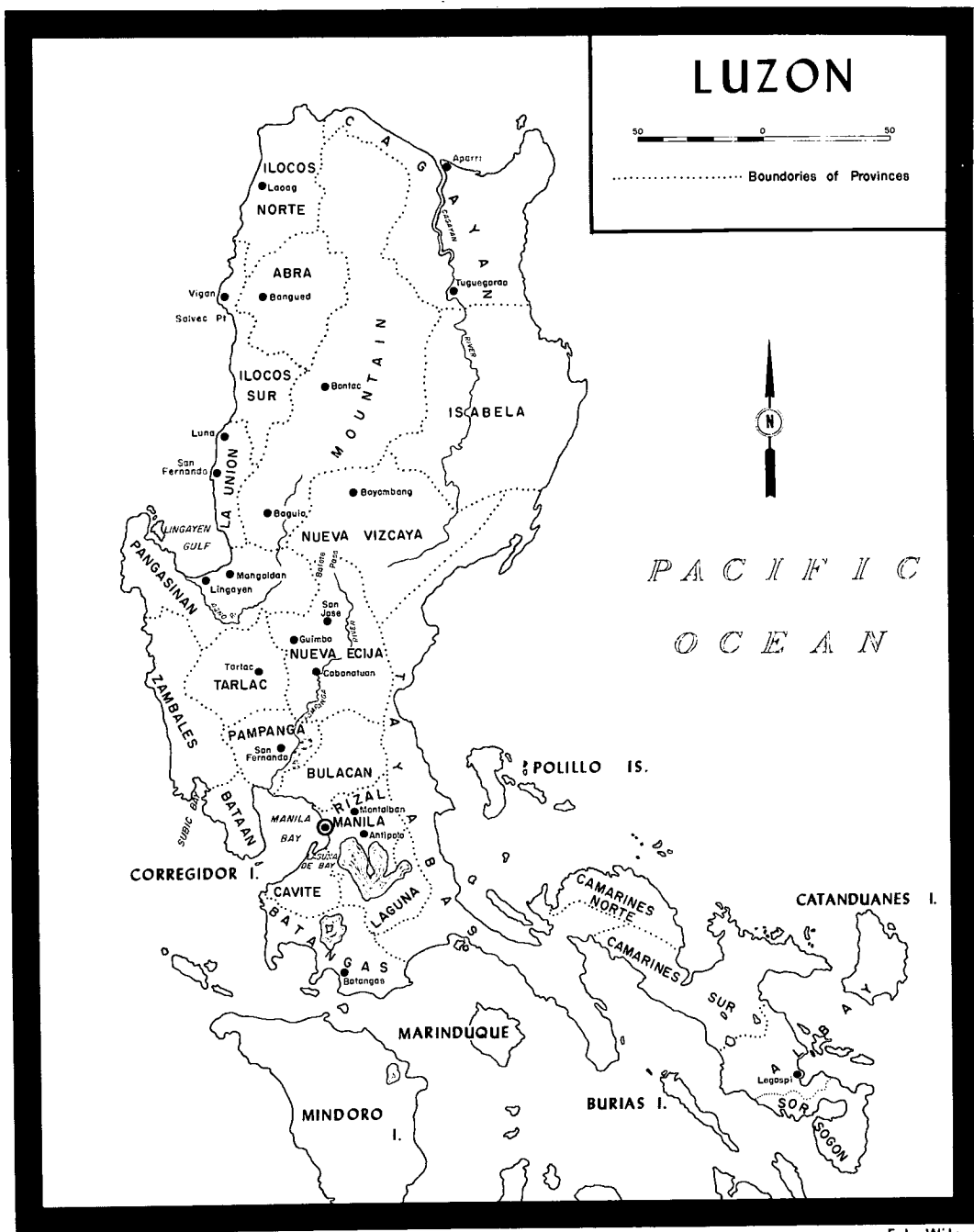
CLOSE AIR SUPPORT ON LUZON¹⁷

The overall Japanese plan for the defense of Luzon provided for the *Fourteenth Area Army* to halt or delay the advance of American forces into Central Luzon (See Map 19). Such tactics were designed to forestall additional American advances towards the Japanese homeland or other islands scheduled for invasion. On the whole, the outlook for the Japanese did not appear promising. At a time when MacArthur's headquarters estimated Japanese strength on Luzon at 152,000, the *Fourteenth Area Army* had only about 90,000 men there; the remainder consisted of 25,000 airmen and 20,000 naval personnel. The defense was further hampered by an extremely meager supply of arms and ammunition. Poor transportation facilities, the lack of effective antitank weapons, and a shortage of rations added to the precariousness of the Japanese foothold on Luzon. Increased activity on the part of American-led Philippine guerrillas also began to prove bothersome to the Japanese.

¹⁵ VMF-212 and VMF-222 WarDs, Jan-Feb45.

¹⁶ USSBS, *Pacific Campaigns*, p. 289.

¹⁷ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: Marine Aviation in Close Air Support File; (HistBr, G-3 Div, HQMC), hereafter *Marine Close Air Support File*; *McCutcheon Rpt*; *Philippines Comment File*; Maj Bertram C. Wright, USA, *The First Cavalry Division in World War II* (Tokyo: Toppan Printing Company, Ltd., 1947) hereafter, Wright, *1st CavDiv Hist*; Hayashi and Coox, *Kōgun*; Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*.



Map 19

E. L. Wilson

These disadvantages did not prevent the enemy from offering determined resistance, but during the latter part of January Sixth Army made important gains. The I Corps had driven 50 miles southeast of Lingayen Gulf to Talevera. (See Map 20). By the end of January, the XIV Corps had seized Clark Field and Fort Stotsenburg and was advancing westward into the Zambales Mountains. Elements of the XIV Corps had in fact reached a point only 25 miles from Manila. Other units landed on western Luzon near Subic Bay on 29 January and pushed eastward. Two days later, American paratroopers descended on Batangas Peninsula to the south of Manila. The stage was set for the envelopment of the capital of the Philippines.

Following the completion of the airstrip at Mangaldan, the Marine aviators of MAGs-24 and -32 had anticipated immediate close support operations for the Sixth Army advance across Luzon. It quickly became apparent, however, that the missions assigned to the Marines differed little from those flown on Leyte by MAG-12, and were directed against targets far behind the front lines. Beginning on 27 January, Marine aviators from Luzon raided San Fernando and Clark Field; in four days' time they had flown 255 sorties and dropped 104 tons of bombs, at the cost of one aircraft. The missions flown were assigned the evening preceding the attacks; moreover, control of the air strikes followed a cumbersome chain of command which led through the Army Air Forces 308th Bombardment Wing all the way to the Sixth Army, a far cry from strikes directed

on target from jeep-mounted air liaison parties in the front lines.

Nevertheless, the dive bombers of the two Marine aircraft groups on Luzon performed creditably during the early phase of their employment on the island. The use of the Douglas Dauntless dive bombers by the Marines was unique in at least one respect, for the Marine squadrons were the only units still flying that type of aircraft during this phase of the war. The Army had discontinued use of dive bombers as early as 1942, and during the summer of 1944 the Navy had turned to more heavily armed and faster aircraft. Despite the valiant service the dive bomber had rendered for Marine aviation from Midway to Bougainville, due to the accuracy obtained with the aircraft in pinpointing targets, the SBD was rapidly becoming obsolete. This was due particularly to its limited combat radius of only 450 miles. The Luzon campaign was to become its swan song and the plane was scheduled for retirement at the end of the Philippines campaign. But Marine aviators in their outmoded aircraft were to have one more chance to show what they could do with the dive bombers in which they had so carefully trained in the Solomons. The opportunity was not long in coming.

It came with the arrival of the Army 1st Cavalry Division on Luzon on 27 January. The division had fought on Samar and Leyte before moving to Luzon. On the following day, the cavalrymen moved to an assembly area near Guimba, 35 miles inland from Lingayen, where the division was assigned to the XIV Corps. When General MacArthur visited the troopers on 31 Janu-

ary, he gave them an electrifying order, which was to:

...go to Manila. Go around the Nips, bounce off the Nips, but go to Manila. Free the internees at Santo Tomas. Take Malacanan Palace and the Legislative Building.¹⁸

To sustain this daring 100-mile dash through enemy territory, the 308th Bombardment Wing alerted all seven Marine squadrons on Luzon to provide a screen of nine planes from dawn to dusk over the 1st Cavalry Division.¹⁹ Here was an assignment that the Major Lieutenant Colonel McCutcheon formulated his doctrine of close air support back in the Solomons. For the first time, Marines would be able to fly close support with their own ALPs functioning right in the front lines. The teams, working closely in conjunction with the ground force commander, could call for air support when opposition was encountered, guide the aircraft to their targets, observe the effects of bombing or strafing, and correct any pilot errors without delay. For the dive bomber squadrons of MAGs-24 and -32, this was the long-awaited chance to prove their value to the ground forces.

At 0001 on 1 February, a specially organized "flying column" under the command of Brigadier General William

C. Chase set out on the dash to Manila. There was an element of risk involved in the venture, for at such short notice the cavalymen had not been able to reconnoiter routes of advance. Intelligence concerning the enemy was vague. The only transportation available consisted of vehicles organic to the 1st Cavalry Division and attached units. The advance, carried out over primitive roads, began in a complete blackout; the columns crossed rivers and rice paddies. At dawn the troopers approached Cabanatuan, their first major objective. There, the enemy offered determined resistance which continued throughout the day.

Despite enemy opposition, the column was not long delayed, and the high degree of mobility of the task force began to pay off. Included in the force were reconnaissance, antitank, medical, field artillery, tank, engineer, and infantry heavy weapons units, all working together to form a balanced striking force. Mindful of the mission they had received from General MacArthur, the cavalymen did not waste any time on a costly frontal assault but, approaching Cabanatuan, converged on the town from three directions. Bypassing the Japanese stronghold, the main body of the task force continued on towards

¹⁸ General MacArthur to MajGen Verne D. Mudge, (USA), cited in Wright, *1st Cav Div Hist*, p. 126.

¹⁹ "The 308th Bomb Wing did not want to authorize the 1st Cavalry Division to levy requests on us directly. Since the Division could not tell a day ahead exactly when and where targets would occur we suggested to them that they submit a request for nine aircraft to be overhead on station continuously from dawn

to dusk. These arrangements were made by Captain Francis B. "Frisco" Godolphin of MAG-24. He visited the 1st Cavalry and ran into a staff officer who had been a student of his at Princeton University. Liaison was thus firmly established. The Division requested the aircraft from the 308th Bomber Wing. The 308th flagged us. We took it from there." MajGen Keith B. McCutcheon ltr to Head, HistBr, dtd 21Oct66, in *Philippines Comment File*, hereafter *McCutcheon ltr*.

Manila. The tactic of bypassing the Japanese wherever possible was followed on successive days, for:

The mission of the 1st Cavalry Division was not to become embroiled in a large scale battle with the enemy, however, but rather to dash through him using such force as was necessary to get to Manila where the internees were waiting for liberation.²⁰

During the three day sweep to Manila, the nine Marine dive bombers screening the advance and flanks of the column maintained a continuous vigil during the daylight hours. The planes were not utilized for bombing or strafing as the troops were able to cope with whatever resistance was encountered. Even though this state of affairs was disappointing to the pilots, "the very presence of the planes contributed greatly to the advance of the Division. The planes in effect were the flank guards and were used for observation and recon missions to provide information to the ground units on the status of roads, bridges, etc."²¹

From the very outset of the operation, an excellent relationship prevailed between the Marine air liaison parties attached to the task force and the cavalrymen. The Marine ALP consisted of two radio jeeps and a radio truck, manned by personnel of MAGs-24 and -32. Each jeep carried a Marine officer and one enlisted man, while the communications officer of MAG-24 and two enlisted men manned the radio truck.²²

Indicative of the matter-of-factness and cordiality which the Marine ALP received from the cavalry troopers is the reception accorded them by General Chase, who was in charge of the expedition. When informed of the presence of a radio jeep carrying two Marines, he merely ordered the occupants to stay beside him and his jeep at all times. Since the jeeps travelled well forward and were very useful in getting information from the planes direct to the unit commanders, it was not long before a battalion or regimental commander became a passenger in one of the radio jeeps.²³

It was apparent that the simplicity of the Marine air-ground communications setup appealed to General Chase, as did the idea of literally having nine SBDs at his fingertips. Droning overhead in a lazy circle, the dive bombers were ready to pounce downward to stop any threat to the flanks of the column. Subsequently, the Marines were to learn to their astonishment that the 308th Bombardment Wing had also attached a formidable air liaison party to the "flying column." This party consisted of:

...a DUKW (complete with Filipino houseboy), a weapons carrier, a jeep, 27 men and 2 officers . . . but its equipment was such that it couldn't keep up with the advance or semiexposed positions.

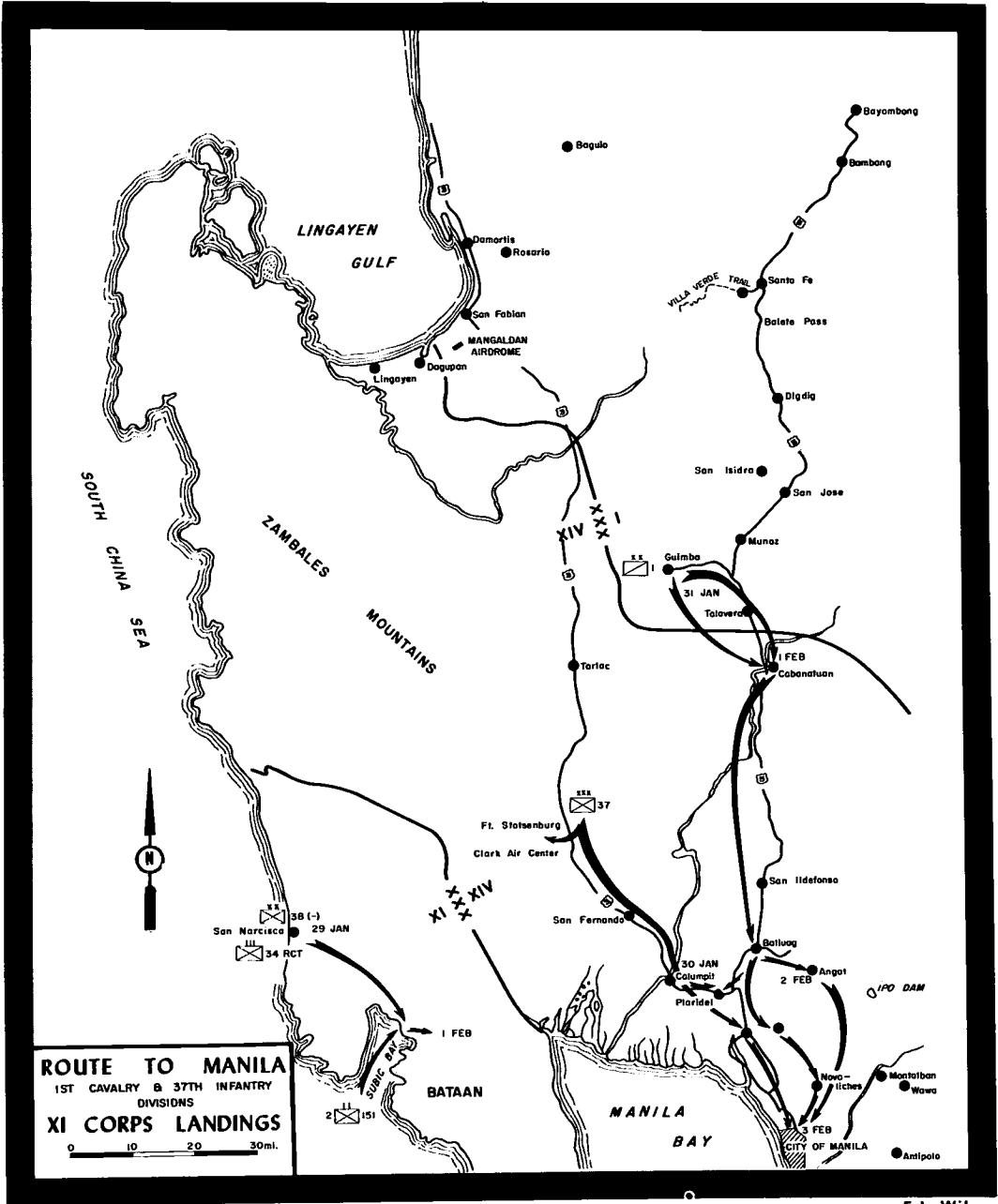
2d Brigade was Captain Godolphin and his driver-radio man, Technical Sergeant R. B. Holland. In the radio truck, travelling with General Mudge and division headquarters were Captain Titcomb, Staff Sergeant A. A. Byers, and Staff Sergeant P. J. Miller. Captain Samuel H. McAloney ltr to CMC, n.d., in *Philippines Comment File*.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Wright, *1st CavDiv Hist*, p. 127.

²¹ *McCutcheon Rpt*, p. 8.

²² With General Chase and the 1st Brigade was the radio jeep with Captain McAloney, driven by radio operator PFC P. E. Armstrong. With General Hugh Hoffman and the



Besides, for air support through that channel, requests would have to be forwarded and approved first by Division, then Corps, then Army and finally by 308th Bomb Wing.²⁴

For three days the Marine dive bombers rode shotgun over the exposed left flank of the advancing column. Tirelessly, the Marine aviators searched an area 30 miles ahead and 20 miles behind the advance ground patrols, reporting all enemy troop movements that could conceivably interfere with the cavalrymen's ever lengthening lines of communications.

Aside from the nine SBDs flying over the task force, other Marine aviators bombed and strafed ahead of the column. On 1 February, while fighting at Cabanatuan was still in progress, two separate nine-plane flights attacked ahead of the cavalrymen in air strikes directed against Angat and San Jose del Monte, where enemy troops were known to have concentrated. On the following day, aircraft of VMSBs-133, -142, and -241 bombed and strafed San Ildefonso just ahead of the "flying column." Later on 2 February, after having passed through Baliuag, vanguards of the 37th Infantry Division near Plaridel and crossed the Angat River, where strong opposition was encountered.

To the southeast of Baliuag, near Santa Maria, the cavalrymen encountered a well-entrenched enemy battalion occupying high ground which commanded the road and the river valley. In a situation where a costly firefight appeared unavoidable, the Marine aviators distracted the Japanese through

a ruse which had worked once before during the capture of Hellzapoppin Ridge on Bougainville.²⁵ Since friendly troops were too close to enemy positions for a conventional dive bombing and strafing attack, "the dive bombers of MAG-32 made several strafing passes at the Japs without firing a shot . . . and enabled the squadron to slug its way into the defensive position and rout the occupants."²⁶

The end of the second day of the drive towards Manila found the vanguard of the column within 15 miles of its objective. As the cavalrymen continued their advance south along Route 5, they ran into a road junction just north of Novaliches which was heavily defended by the Japanese. This junction, quickly dubbed "The Hot Corner," protected the approaches to a vital bridge in the path of the column. When the Marine aviators reported that this bridge was still intact, the cavalrymen rushed the Japanese defenses at the road junction and made for the bridge. Braving a hail of enemy fire, a Navy mine disposal officer ran onto the span and cut a burning fuze to a large mine which would have blown the bridge to bits within seconds.

At 1835 on 3 February, the vanguard of the "flying column" crossed the Manila city limits. The cavalrymen slipped

²⁵ For a detailed account of the battle for Hellzapoppin' Ridge, see Henry I. Shaw, Jr., and Maj Douglas T. Kane, *Isolation of Rabaul—History of U. S. Marine Corps Operations in World War II*, v. II (Washington: HistBr, G-3 Div, HQMC, 1963), Part III, Chap 6, section entitled "Hellzapoppin' Ridge and Hill 600A," *passim*.

²⁶ Wright, *1st CavDiv Hist*, p. 128.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

into the city just as dusk was settling. Guided by two Filipinos, the troopers began to roll past the Chinese Cemetery, where they became embroiled in a running battle with the enemy who sought cover behind the tombstones. The column kept moving through the darkness toward Santo Tomas University. Shortly before 2100, the 3,700 emaciated and tattered internees huddled inside the compound heard the clanking of tank treads.

Indistinct voices floated up to the internees leaning out of the windows bent on missing nothing. A flare was sent up. Its light showed the time to be 8:50 P.M. Everything was quiet.

A voice cut through the darkness: "Where the hell is the front gate?" The Americans had arrived for sure.²⁷

Thus ended the 100-mile dash of the 1st Cavalry Division to Manila. In 66 hours after setting forth from Guimba, the task force had reached its objective, though driving the enemy out of Manila was to prove a costly and time-consuming process which was not due to be completed until 3 March.

For the part they had played during the dash for Manila, the Marine aviators received generous praise from the cavalymen. The 1st Cavalry Division history evaluated the contribution of the Marines as follows:

Much of the success of the entire movement is credited to the superb air cover, flank protection, and reconnaissance provided by the Marine Air Groups 24 and 32. The 1st Cavalry's audacious drive down through Central Luzon was the longest such operation ever made in the Southwest Pacific Area using only air cover for flank protection.²⁸

Major General Verne D. Mudge, commanding the 1st Cavalry Division, was equally unsparing in his praise. Commenting on the support received from Marine dive bombers, the general had this to say:

On our drive to Manila, I depended solely on the Marines to protect my left flank against possible Japanese counter-attack. The job that they turned in speaks for itself. I can say without reservation that the Marine dive bombers are one of the most flexible outfits that I have seen in this war. They will try anything once, and from my experience with them, I have found out that anything they try usually pans out in their favor. The Marine dive bombers of the First Wing have kept the enemy on the run. They have kept him underground and have enabled troops to move up with fewer casualties and with greater speed. I cannot say enough in praise of these men of the dive bombers and I am commending them through proper channels for the job they have done in giving my men close ground support in this operation.²⁹

General Chase remarked "that he had never seen such able, close and accurate air support as the Marine fliers were giving him,"³⁰ and this was ample praise, indeed, from the man who had fearlessly led his "flying column" into the heart of Manila.

Events in the progressing Philippines Campaign did not permit the Marine aviators to rest on their laurels, and other missions, equally as challenging as the drive to Manila, awaited them.

²⁹ Statement of MajGen Verne D. Mudge, USA, n.d., in *Marine Close Air Support File*, p. 9.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

SUPPORTING GUERRILLAS³¹

The excellent record which the Marine aviators of MAG-24 and -32 established in rendering close support to the 1st Cavalry Division on Luzon did not end with the liberation of Manila. While fighting for the capital of the Philippines continued throughout February and into the early days of March, another unusual assignment awaited the Marine pilots. Once again they were called upon to provide close air support, but in this instance the support was for Filipino guerrilla bands which were attempting to drive the Japanese invaders from Philippine soil.

The insurgent movement dated back to the early days of World War II, when U.S. Army officers organized remnants of cut-off Filipino forces into guerrilla bands. At the time that American resistance on Bataan ended, two U.S. Army officers, Major Russell W. Volkmann and Captain Donald D. Blackburn escaped and made their way to Northern Luzon, where they reported for duty to Colonel Martin Moses, the senior U.S. Army officer in that area.³² It was estimated that "five regiments of these natives roamed the mountains and jungles of Northern Luzon,"³³ though a more conservative breakdown

in the official Army history lists guerrilla strength on Luzon prior to the Lingayen landings at about 8,000 men, of whom only 2,000 were well armed.³⁴ This figure subsequently increased to more than 20,000 men.

Following the Luzon landings, Sixth Army took official cognizance of these insurgents by organizing them under the designation of United States Armed Forces in the Philippines (USAFIP or USFIP), North Luzon (NL). By any standard, the equipment of the guerrillas was primitive and consisted primarily of small arms. They had no artillery, only a few mortars, and very few machine guns.

From the Japanese point of view, even prior to the Lingayen landings, the guerrillas had already become annoyingly active. The *Area Army* was apprehensive lest all the natives become partisans whenever U.S. troops landed on Luzon. From the middle of November 1944, the Japanese therefore began to suppress the armed guerrillas. The outnumbered and ill-equipped insurgents proved no match for the Japanese, for they were not organized to engage major Japanese units in a sustained effort. At the outset it appeared unlikely "that Volckmann's or any other guerrilla unit, would ever become effective combat organizations."³⁵

Increasing guerrilla strength and successes prompted General Krueger to reassess the role that the insurgents

³¹ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: MAG-32 WarDs, Jan44-Jun45; Wright, *1st CavDiv Hist*; Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*; Hayashi and Coox, *Kōgun*.

³² BGen Russell W. Volkmann, USA, ltr to Head, HistBr, G-3 Div, HQMC, dtd 21Nov66, in *Philippines Comment File*, hereafter *Volkmann ltr*.

³³ Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*, p. 307.

³⁴ Smith, *Triumph in the Philippines*, p. 466.

³⁵ *Ibid*. The above is disputed by General Volckmann who claims that after January 1944 the Japanese forces presented very little overall threat to USAFIP. *Volckmann ltr*.

were to play on Luzon. In the course of February more and more of the irregulars were equipped with arms and uniforms. In addition to harassing the Japanese, guerrillas also were increasingly active in reporting Japanese troop movements and gun positions on northern Luzon by means of radio equipment controlled by Colonel Volckmann. The rapid growth of the guerrilla forces on northern Luzon permitted an expansion of the role that the irregulars were to play. In addition to harassing raids, sabotage, and intelligence, the guerrilla mission was enlarged until in due time Colonel Volckmann's insurgents were able to substitute for a full combat division.

By mid-February 1945, Sixth Army was aware of the close support work that Marine aviation had been doing on Luzon. Since the Marines had trained ALPs which had already been successful in coaching dive bombers to their targets near Manila, the 308th Bombardment Wing decided to attach Marines to Colonel Volckmann's guerrillas to direct close support missions. Once again, the Marine aviators were confronted with a situation that even a few months previously no one could have anticipated. On 20 February, four officers from MAG-24 and -32 held a preliminary conference with Colonel Volckmann, the purpose of which was to plan methods of giving close air support to the guerrillas on northern Luzon.

As a result of this meeting, three officers, three enlisted men, a radio jeep, and a radio truck were loaded on an LCT and put ashore on northwestern Luzon about 50 miles behind the enemy

lines and attached to Colonel Volckmann's guerrilla headquarters at Luna, where they arrived on Washington's Birthday. From the point of view of Marine aviation, the assignment promised to be of more than casual interest, for:

... there the airplane could prove itself as a weapon against enemy troops because there was no confusing it with the field artillery and naval gunfire. If a dead Japanese was found who hadn't been drilled by a .30 caliber bullet, the chances were he owed death to the close-support airplane.³⁰

The first mission awaiting the Marine ALP was the elimination of Japanese entrenched on a ridge just east of the enemy-held port of San Fernando. The ridge ran from north to south; in the hands of the guerrillas this terrain feature would afford control over the port city from the east. The trouble was that the Japanese were well dug in on the ridge and held the highest parts of it. The terrain was devoid of cover and with no supporting weapons to assist them, the Filipinos were stymied.

The arrival of the ALP offered new possibilities, which were realized at once. The resourceful guerrillas cut a trail from the north to the top of the ridge. Under cover of darkness, they dragged the radio jeep up to the top, where it was concealed behind a rise in the ground about 50 yards from the front line. A remote control was run from the jeep to a good observation post at a high point just behind the dug-in troops. The radio truck remained a few miles to the rear at a

³⁰ Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*, p. 308.

location where it could function as a direct link between the jeep and MAGs-Dagupan 50 miles to the south. In order to eliminate any chance of having an air strike hit friendly troops, cloth panels were displayed to mark the front line, a procedure that had already been tested and adopted prior to World War II.

The first strike aircraft to arrive were 12 Army planes, which were guided to the ridge and flew over its entire length until the pilots had a clear picture of the front lines. What followed next has been described in the following words:

All was now set for the strike. Running from north to south at a minimum altitude in three plane sections, the planes released 100-pound parafrags [fragmentation bombs dropped by parachute, fuzed to go off instantaneously on contact] to hit less than 200 yards beyond the front line panels, and at minimum intervals on down the ridge. The result was a complete plastering of the entire ridge and the Jap entrenchments for 1,000 yards ahead of the Filipinos. At the completion of the bomb runs the planes returned and made very low altitude strafing runs, starting in hardly 100 yards ahead of the guerrillas and raking the ridge for a little over 1,000 yards. After three or four live runs were made by the planes everything was set for the troop advance.³⁷

Following a prearranged signal, the guerrillas charged out of their holes while the aircraft, forewarned of the forward movement of friendly troops by radio, skimmed over the heads of the insurgents in dry runs. The Filipinos advanced 1,000 yards to a high

point on the ridge without incurring a single casualty, encountering only dead Japanese and seizing a quantity of abandoned materiel en route. About 50 Japanese attempting to withdraw from the ridge were spotted and strafed by the Army aircraft.

Once the aircraft left the area, however, the Japanese rallied and began to inflict casualties. Once more, the Marine radio truck called for air support. On this occasion five Marine dive bombers carrying 500-pound general purpose bombs pounded and strafed the Japanese positions on the center of the ridge. Again the Japanese were forced to pull back from the hill, but on this occasion the radio jeep "talked" the dive bombers onto houses in the valley where a number of the enemy had been observed taking refuge. Both houses and occupants were eliminated after final corrections had been made by dry runs on specific buildings.

On 26 February, as the fight for San Fernando continued, the guerrillas encountered difficulty in driving well dug-in Japanese from Reservoir Hill, an elevation just north of the city. Once again, using the same tactics previously employed in driving the enemy from a hilltop at San Fernando, Army and Marine aircraft bombed and machine-gunned the Japanese on the hill, knocking out individual pillboxes during the attack. While aircraft buzzed over their heads, the guerrillas occupied the hill. Later that day the Japanese counter-attacked with artillery support and recaptured the height. As a result, on 28 February, the Marine dive bombers and Army fighters had to repeat the entire performance, though on this occasion

³⁷ Samuel H. McAloney, "Air Support," in *Marine Corps Gazette*, v. 29, no. 11, (Nov 45), pp. 38-43, hereafter McAloney, "Air Support."

napalm was added to burn down bamboo thickets. This measure was effective, and guerrilla capture of Reservoir Hill proved permanent.

In many other instances too numerous to mention here the coaching of air strikes by Marine ALPs in the front lines was similarly successful. In one instance, the air strikes killed 137 out of 150 enemy troops. As to the remainder, the guerrillas reported: "Of the 13 who were still alive, we have killed seven and are hunting the other six in the woods."³⁸ As the guerrilla movement on Luzon grew in size and insurgent operations increased in momentum, the Marines continued to give such close air support as was required. On 1 March, one of the Marine officers serving as a member of the ALP with USAFIP, Captain Jack Titcomb, was killed by a sniper's bullet "while asking for more planes for a strike, microphone in hand."³⁹

Between 5-31 March, a total of 186 missions were flown in support of guerrillas on Northern Luzon. As the guerrilla operations spread to other islands in the archipelago, the Marines provided additional ALPs where needed, as well as the necessary close support. In each instance, the results obtained were the same. The Japanese either died in place or were forced to pull back. Of one position where the Japanese had decided to stick it out, a report of the position after it had been pasted

by close support aircraft described it as "a stink hole of dead."⁴⁰

On northern Luzon, guerrilla operations finally reached proportions where Colonel Volckmann's force was able "to substitute for a full division, taking the place of the regular division that Krueger had planned to send up the west coast in a series of shore to shore operations, an undertaking that by mid-February, USAFIP (NL) successes had rendered unnecessary."⁴¹

Once again, as in close support of regular forces, the versatility of Marine aviation had vindicated Lieutenant Colonel McCutcheon's doctrine. Before the liberation of the Philippines was completed, Marine aviators were to make further important contributions to the campaign.

FINAL MARINE AVIATION ACTIVITIES ON LUZON⁴²

The arrival of the 1st Cavalry Division in the city of Manila in early February did not mean the end of fighting for the capital of the Philippines. An additional month was required before the last Japanese resistance was wiped out. In the mountains northeast of the city, about 80,000 Japanese were holed up in caves and pillboxes. The Japanese line of defense known as the *Shimbu* Line, generally extended for about 25 miles, from north to southeast. The

⁴⁰ McAloney, "Air Support," p. 41.

⁴¹ Smith, *Triumph in the Philippines*, p. 467.

⁴² Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: MAG-24 WarD, Mar45; MAG-32 WarDs, Feb-Mar45; *Marine Close Air Support File*; Boggs, *Marines in the Philippines*; Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

³⁹ Comment of Capt Samuel H. McAloney, as cited in Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*, p. 310.

50,000 Japanese comprising the *Shimbu Group*, firmly entrenched in excellent defensive positions, posed a threat not only to the city of Manila but also to the vital reservoir on which the city depended for its water supply.

Even though Marine aviators had given an excellent account of themselves in supporting the 1st Cavalry Division Drive to Manila and in assisting guerrillas in northwestern Luzon, a number of Army commanders still were unaware of the type of air support available to them or otherwise remained skeptical. It became incumbent upon the Marine aviators to make their capabilities known to high-ranking Army officers. As commander of the Marine air base at Mangaldan, Colonel Jerome approached Major General Innis P. Swift, Commander of I Corps, and the Commanding General of the XIV Corps, Major General Oscar W. Griswold, urging these commanders to make maximum use of close air support. In the final analysis, the division commanders had to be convinced that close support would materially help the infantry.

The task of making the rounds of infantry divisions fell to officers of Colonel Jerome's staff. The efforts of these officers to sell Marine close support to the division commanders did not always fall on fertile ground. One of the division commanders, Major General Edwin D. Patrick, USA, commanding the 6th Infantry Division was particularly hard to convince. Captain James L. McConaughy, Jr., one of the assistant MAG-32 intelligence officers, summed up the division commander's attitude as follows: "He (the general) was scared of airplanes; that is, scared

of their accuracy and lack of ground control. He was polite but absolutely firm."⁴³

On 8 February, when the 6th Infantry Division and the 1st Cavalry Division faced formidable Japanese defenses east of Manila, the division commander experienced a change of heart. General Patrick happened to be visiting the 1st Cavalry Division zone of attack when General Mudge, commander of the cavalry division, called for an air strike to help his troops seize a ridge from which the Japanese were pouring heavy machine gun and mortar fire on his troops. When the leader of the air strike arrived overhead, the Marine air liaison officer instructed him to hit the Japanese on the reverse side of the hill in order to preclude any chance of hitting friendly troops. As the two division commanders watched, the target was marked with white phosphorus smoke. Shortly thereafter, the first bomb hit near the crest of the ridge, on the reverse slope. As seven dive bombers in succession unloaded their bombs on the target, "the cavalymen cheered like football fans."⁴⁴ After the dust had settled a patrol gingerly moved up to the crest of the ridge. There was no opposition. What was left of 8 machine gun and 15 mortar emplacements offered mute testimony to the effectiveness of close air support. Three hundred enemy dead lay nearby. In

⁴³ Capt James L. McConaughy, Jr., ltr to Robert Sherrod, dtd 13May48, as cited in Boggs, *Marines in the Philippines*, p. 84, hereafter *McConaughy ltr*.

⁴⁴ Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*, p. 304.

addition, the troopers picked up 11 unmanned heavy machine guns.

Two days later, in the biggest strike of the Luzon campaign, 81 aircraft from VMSBs-241, -142, -243, -244, and -341 attacked Japanese oil dumps, anti-aircraft artillery positions, and a number of towns serving as enemy strong-points. Once again, with the help of guerrilla-supplied information, the bombs landed square on target.

By this time General Patrick required no further urging. When the 6th Infantry Division launched an attack against the *Shimbu* Line on 24 February, the division commander saw to it that Marine aviators were coached to the target by an air liaison officer. The first bombs hit targets 1,000 yards from the friendly troops, but on subsequent runs bombs were dropped within 500 yards or less from the American lines. All the tricks of the trade, including dummy runs while the infantry advanced, were employed.

General Patrick was so impressed with this performance that henceforth he not only began to insist on close air support but also required all units of his division to submit accurate evaluations of air strikes. As they arrived, such evaluations bore additional witness to the value of Marine air support.

One of the regiments of the 6th Infantry Division, the 1st Infantry, staunchly refused to have anything to do with air support—Marine or otherwise. Colonel James E. Rees, the regimental commander, had been leery of aircraft ever since 4 February when Fifth Air Force B-25s, making an unscheduled strafing run across the regimental front, had killed 2 and wounded

25 of his men near San Jose north of Manila.⁴⁵ However, on 28 February a situation arose which made it incumbent upon the regimental commander to call for the assistance of Marine aircraft. During the heavy fighting then in progress at the *Shimbu* Line to the east of Manila, most of a group of 15 or 20 men withdrawing from high ground near Mount Mataba lost their footing and tumbled into a 40 foot ravine. Eventually a lieutenant and a dozen men wound up in the ravine, which was covered by enemy fire. The men refused to abandon the lieutenant whose leg was injured and who was unable to walk. A member of the Marine ALP in the vicinity has described the situation as follows:

There were Japs a couple of hundred yards away, though because of the terrain it might take them an hour to reach the stranded party. We said we could help. After a very thorough briefing, all by radio, the regimental commander said the lead plane could drop one wing bomb. It was beautiful to watch. We were on a high cliff on one side of the valley and it was a clear day. The first drop was dead on. The colonel was impressed and allowed that we could let the lead plane come in again and drop his belly and other wing bomb. It took the SBD 20 minutes to climb up again. His second dive was fantastically accurate, too, and the colonel said he was convinced, so the other eight planes followed the squadron leader down. The bombing was fantastically successful—the farthest one of 27 bombs being 30 yards off the target. They got the party out thanks to this discouragement to the Nips and from then on this colonel couldn't get enough planes for his regiment. Liter-

⁴⁵ 6th InfDiv Jnl and Jnl File, 4Feb45; 1st InfRpt Luzon, pp. 23-24 as cited in Smith, *Triumph in the Philippines*, p. 198.

ally, he asked for nine flights (nine planes each) as a standing, daily order.⁴⁶

One of the bystanders closely observing the air strikes was General Patrick, commander of the 6th Infantry Division. In a letter of commendation, the division commander had this to say about Marine air support and this incident:

The close air support given this Division by the 308th Bombardment Wing and Marine Air Group, Dagupan (MAGD), in the operations now being conducted in the Marakina Watershed area has been outstanding. The advance of our troops over difficult mountainous terrain against a well-armed determined enemy is being made possible in no small part by such air strikes.

Particularly noteworthy have been the skillfully coordinated and accurate air strikes of the SBD's of the MAGD based at Mangaldan Field. In one strike made on 28 February against Mt. Mataba, these Marine pilots dive-bombed a pinpointed target located between two friendly forces with accuracy comparable to that obtained by field artillery. The courage, patience, and willingness displayed by these men deserve high praise.⁴⁷

Throughout the month of February, while bitter fighting continued in and around Manila, Marine aviation remained much in evidence in the Philippine capital. In addition to providing close air support to the ground troops, SBDs of MAGs-24 and -32 divebombed Nichols Field, attacked docks and buildings on Corregidor, struck at derelict shipping that served as enemy nests of resistance in Manila Harbor, and other-

wise harassed the Japanese at every turn. Marine aviators, never loath to improvise when the situation called for it, soon took advantage of one of the broader Manila avenues:

Within three days after the American entry into Manila, the 1st Cavalry Brigade had established itself in the vicinity of Quezon City, a suburb in the eastern outskirts of Manila. A widened Quezon boulevard turned into a makeshift airstrip, became a familiar roosting spot for SBDs. Especially did it facilitate pilot forays to front lines for ground liaison duty or observation. A MAGSDAGUPAN skeleton crew later was maintained on the "strip" to service Marine planes landing there, and two jeeps were kept on hand for transportation forward.

* * * * *

The boulevard-strip, as an emergency landing field during these (close support) operations, had something more than incidental utility. For a time, an average of one SBD per day had reason to seek refuge there because of damage from antiaircraft fire, mechanical difficulties or fuel shortage.⁴⁸

For the remainder of February and during early March the SBDs gave close support to the 6th, 25th, 37th, 38th, 40th, and 43d Infantry Divisions, as well as the 1st Cavalry and the 11th Airborne Divisions. In the case of each division the Marine aviators found acceptance once the quality of their air support had become recognized. Far from being content to rest on their laurels, Marine aviators continued to perfect air-ground coordination of air strikes. One innovation tested on 19 February was the use of an airborne coordinator. A single plane, piloted by the air coordinator, reported to the

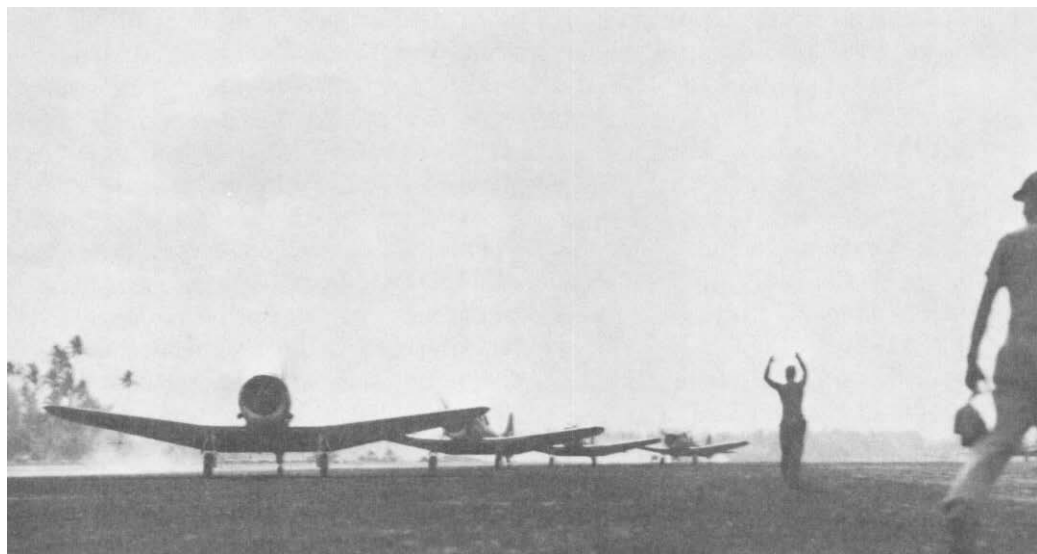
⁴⁶ *McConaughy ltr.*

⁴⁷ MajGen Edwin D. Patrick ltr to CO, 308th Bombardment Wing; CO, Marine Air Group, Dagupan (MAGD) Thru: CG, XIV Corps, dtd 1Mar45, in *Marine Close Air Support File*.

⁴⁸ Boggs, *Marines in the Philippines*, p. 90.



U.S. ARMY 37TH INFANTRY DIVISION troops move up *Highway 5* on Luzon after Marine dive bomber attack on enemy hill positions. (USMC A700603).



MARINE DIVE BOMBERS returning from close air support mission for Sixth Army troops on Luzon. (USMC 109092)

SAP and ALP prior to arrival on target of the strike flight. Ground radio tendered him all target and friendly troop identification and, upon the arrival of the flight over the target, he would make a marking run on the objective for their benefit. This run could be followed by an immediate attack.

Aside from an occasional air alert, the air base at Mangaldan escaped enemy attack throughout the month of February. Early on 2 March, the Japanese struck back in retaliation for all the indignities Marine aviation had heaped upon them since the invasion of Luzon. At 0200 a Japanese twin-engine bomber (commonly known as Betty), flying at a high altitude, was picked up by the searchlights. While every anti-aircraft gun in the area opened up on this lone intruder, almost all personnel stood up in their foxholes to watch the action. Exploiting the diversion, two additional Bettys came over the camp area at an altitude of 300 feet or less and dropped nearly 300 antipersonnel bombs on the unsuspecting Marines. The casualties caused by this air attack were 4 dead and 78 wounded.⁴⁰ Among the officers wounded were Colonel Lyle H. Meyer, who had assumed command of MAGs-Dagupan on 19 February, and Lieutenant Colonel Wallace T. Scott, operations officer of MAG-32.

Around a dozen 500-lb. bombs struck the east end of the airfield and burrowed deeply into the ground, but did not explode. A direct bomb hit on an SBD resulted in the total loss of the aircraft; another SBD had a wing torn

off by shell fragments. Damage to the telephone switchboard, sick bay area, ordnance and quartermaster tents, and other base facilities was extensive. Nevertheless, the raid did not disrupt flight operations, and squadrons carried out their assigned strikes as usual while the ground echelon went about the business of restoring the camp.

The progress of operations on Luzon and operations planned for the southern Philippines resulted in a reshuffling of Marine aviation units at MAGs-Dagupan. As early as mid-February Colonel Jerome received word that MAG-32 would be used in the Mindanao campaign and that the ground echelon of the air group would accompany Army assault forces into Zamboanga on 10 March. For the Zamboanga operation, one additional tactical squadron was transferred to MAG-32, bringing the strength of the air group to four squadrons. By 20 February the ground echelon of MAG-32 had moved to the vicinity of San Fabian, and departed in LSTs on 23 February. Some members of the MAG-32 headquarters staff left Mangaldan during the last two days of February by air transport.

Even though the landings at Zamboanga took place on schedule on 10 March, the flight echelon of MAG-32 remained on Luzon until 24 March, the last aircraft of the air group departing from the island on the 26th. MAG-24, now reduced to three squadrons, remained at Mangaldan. For the ground echelon of MAG-24, the departure of MAG-32 planes and pilots represented a major relief, since the movement of the ground echelon of MAG-32 on 23 February had imposed on the MAG-24

⁴⁰ MAG-24 WarD, Mar45.

ground crews the necessity of servicing both air groups. Combat operations of MAG-24 continued unchanged until 2 April, when the squadrons were ordered to halt operations and prepare for movement to Mindanao. As the ground echelon of MAG-24 was in the process of boarding ship on 7 April, Sixth Army called for the resumption of combat operations. Torrential rains and extremely heavy mud precluded operational use of Mangaldan until 10 April, when nine aircraft bombed the Japanese near Balete Pass. Four days later, it became evident that rain and mud were washing out the airfield, and all operations ceased as of that date. The flight echelons of the three squadrons moved south to Clark Field. On 20 April MAG-24 joined MAG-32 on Mindanao.

During the time they operated on Luzon, the Marine aviators of MAGs-24 and -32 had flown a total of 8,842 combat missions. The SBDs fired over one and a half million rounds of .30 and .50 caliber ammunition and dropped 19,167 bombs. Between 27 January and 14 April, the Marines flew an average of 1,000 sorties per week.⁵⁰ The ground crews at MAGsDagupan kept an average of 81 percent of the SBDs in a state of combat readiness; in many instances

individual aircraft were flown up to nine hours per day.

Marine Corps files are replete with letters of commendation from Army corps and division commanders who witnessed the performance of Marine aviators on Luzon. In praising the achievements of Marines on Luzon, General Walter Krueger, commanding the Sixth Army, had this to say:

In the crucial stages of the Luzon Campaign . . . this support was of such high order that I personally take great pleasure in expressing to every officer and enlisted man . . . my appreciation and official commendation for their splendid work.

Commanders have repeatedly expressed their admiration for the pin-point precision, the willingness and enthusiastic desire of pilots to fly missions from dawn to dusk and the extremely close liaison with the ground forces which characterized the operations of the Marine fighter groups. By constant visits of commanders and pilots to front line units in order to observe targets and to gain an understanding of the ground soldier's problems, by the care which squadron commanders and pilots took to insure the maximum hits, and by the continuous, devoted work of ground crews in maintaining an unusually high average of operational crews, the 24th and 32d Marine Air Groups exemplified outstanding leadership, initiative, aggressiveness and high courage in keeping with the finest traditions of the Marine Corps.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Figures taken from Marine Corps statistics as cited in Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*, p. 311.

⁵¹ General Walter Krueger ltr to CO, 1st MAW, dtd 16May45, in *Marine Close Air Support File*.

Southern Philippines Operations¹

The beginning of March 1945 saw American forces firmly entrenched in the Philippines. On Leyte, military operations were all but completed and the objectives of the Leyte campaign, the establishment of a solid base for the reconquest of the Philippines, had been achieved. Japanese emphasis on the defense of Leyte had adversely affected the enemy capability of making a decisive stand on Luzon, the strategic nerve center of the Philippines. Unable to stem the American advance, the *Fourteenth Area Army* on Luzon resorted to the operational stratagem of "confining the American forces to Luzon despite inferior strength . . . and holing up in the mountainous districts of Luzon."² Aside from tying down sizable

American forces in what was at best a prolonged delaying action, the enemy was unable to seriously upset the American timetable. In four months of operations, the U. S. Sixth and Eighth Armies had also seized Samar and Mindoro, as well as some of the smaller islands in the Visayan and Samar Seas.

Barely a month after the campaign on Luzon had begun, General MacArthur decided that the time had come to move into the southern Philippines. The general deemed the recapture of Palawan, Mindanao, and other islands in the Sulu Archipelago essential for two reasons. First, bypassing the southern Philippines would leave their inhabitants at the mercy of Japanese garrisons for an undetermined period of time, a situation clearly inconsistent with United States interests in the area. Secondly, theater strategy required early seizure of the islands for ultimate use as air and naval bases, as well as for serving as a steppingstone in the projected conquest of Borneo and other Japanese-held islands in the Dutch East Indies, the area presently part of Indonesia.

The plans developed for the recapture of the Southern Philippines were known as the VICTOR operations. They were numbered I through V and called for the following schedule:

VICTOR I (Panay)	18Mar45
VICTOR II (Cebu, Negros,	

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this chapter is derived from: Eighth Army Operational Monograph on the Palawan Operation (VICTOR III) n.d., hereafter Eighth Army, *Palawan Ops* (NARS, WWII Recs Div); Eighth Army Operational Monograph on the Zamboanga-Sulu Archipelago Operation (VICTOR IV), n.d., hereafter Eighth Army, *Zamboanga-Sulu Archipelago Ops* (NARS, WWII Recs Div); *Marine Close Air Support File*; Hayashi and Coox, *Kōgun*; Boggs, *Marines in the Philippines*; Robert L. Eichelberger and Milton Mackaye, *Our Jungle Road to Tokyo* (New York: The Viking Press, 1950), hereafter Eichelberger and Mackaye, *Jungle Road to Tokyo*, quoted with permission; Smith, *Triumph in the Philippines*; Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*.

² Hayashi and Coox, *Kōgun*, p. 132.

Bohol)	25Mar45
VICTOR III (Palawan)	28Feb45
VICTOR IV (Zamboanga and	
Sulu Archipelago)	10Mar45
VICTOR V (Mindanao)	17Apr45

On 6 February 1945, General MacArthur ordered Eighth Army to prepare operations against Palawan, Mindanao, and other islands in the Sulu Archipelago. Lieutenant General Robert L. Eichelberger, the army commander, had available for the southern Philippine operations Headquarters, X Corps, five infantry divisions, and a regimental combat team of parachutists. On 17 February, Eighth Army issued a plan of operations for the reoccupation of the southern Philippines.³ The first of the operations was VICTOR III. Landings by the 41st Infantry Division were to be carried out on 28 February at Palawan and on 10 March at Zamboanga, the western extremity of Mindanao. The Thirteenth Air Force was to provide air support for the two operations in addition to its mission of supporting Eighth Army on those Philippine islands that were located south of Luzon.

Far East Air Forces planned to have Marine aviation units participate in the liberation of the southern Philippines. To this end, MAG-12 and -14, stationed on Leyte and Samar respectively, were to reinforce the Thirteenth Air Force; the Marine dive bomber units of MAGs-24 and -32, which had performed so well on Luzon, were to be shifted south to Mindanao as soon as they had completed their mission of supporting the Sixth Army. MAGs-12, -14, and -32

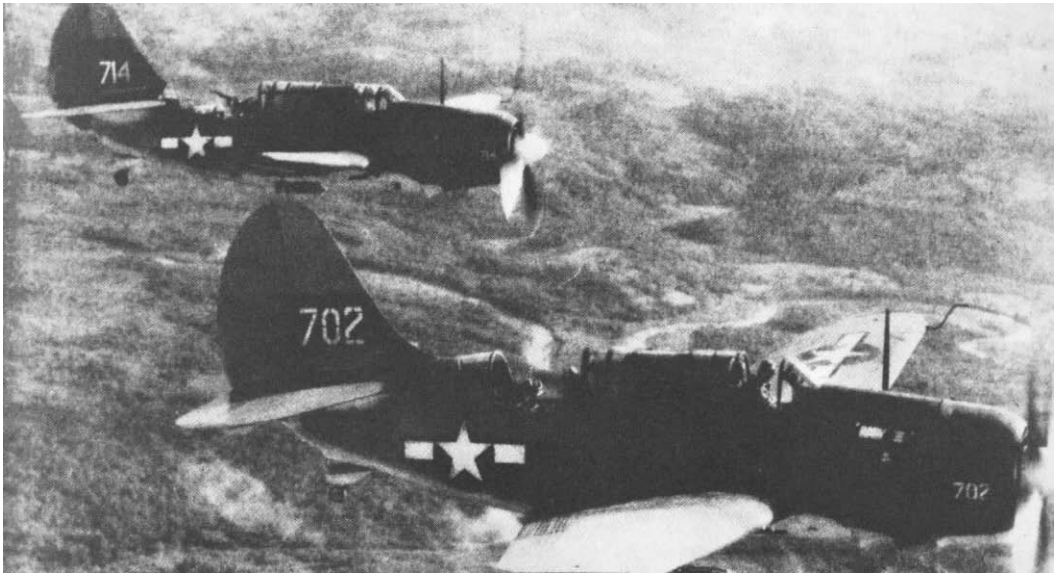
were to provide direct air support during the landings on Zamboanga and in the subsequent ground operations.

The 41st Infantry Division had the task of seizing the town of Zamboanga in an amphibious assault. Due to its peculiar location in relation to the remainder of Mindanao, Zamboanga province was virtually separated from the island except for a narrow isthmus. There, inaccessible mountains and dense jungle formed a major terrain obstacle. During the conquest of Mindanao, Eighth Army expected to rely on the assistance of a sizable guerrilla force. Organized in 1942 and supplied and trained by the Americans since then, this native force could be of immediate assistance to the invasion troops. The guerrillas, under the command of Colonel Wendell W. Fertig, numbered over 33,000 by February of 1945; 16,000 of them were armed.

Similar guerrilla organizations of varying size existed on the islands of Negros, Cebu, and Panay. Bohol, Palawan, and other islands in the Sulu Archipelago harbored small guerrilla units that were relatively ineffective. Prior to the assault on the southern Philippine islands, the primary mission of the insurgents was to furnish intelligence; once the invasion of an island was imminent, the guerrillas were to cut enemy lines of communications, clear beachheads, and box in the Japanese to the best of their capabilities.

The Japanese garrison on eastern Mindanao consisted of the *30th* and *100th Infantry Divisions*; the *54th Independent Mixed Brigade*, consisting of three infantry battalions as a nucleus, with attached naval units, was deployed on

³ Eighth Army FO No. 20, dtd 17Feb45.



CURTIS "HELLDIVERS" armed with rockets and bombs, replace SBDs of VMSB-244. (USMC A700606)



FILIPINO GUERRILLAS at Malabang Airstrip, Mindanao. (USMC 117638)

Zamboanga Peninsula. The *55th Independent Mixed Brigade*, composed of two infantry battalions, occupied Jolo Island in the Sulu Archipelago. The *102d Division* was spread over Panay, Negros, Cebu, and Bohol; half of the division had been previously sent to Leyte. The Japanese in the southern Philippines were under the command of the *Thirty-Fifth Army* headed by Lieutenant General Sosaku Suzuki. The latter's attempts to evacuate most of his forces from Leyte to the southern islands was frustrated by the vigilance of American aircraft and torpedo boats; in all, only about 1,750 of the 20,000 Japanese on Leyte eventually made it across to Cebu Island during the early months of 1945. The Japanese commander was able to make good his escape to Cebu in mid-March, only to perish at sea a month later while en route to Mindanao, when the vessel on which he was embarked was sunk off Negros by American aircraft.

There were more than 102,000 Japanese in the southern Philippines, including 53,000 Army troops, nearly 20,000 members of the Army air forces, 15,000 naval personnel, and 14,800 non-combatant civilians. Despite this imposing figure, there were only about 30,000 combat troops. Moreover, the enemy garrisons were spread over numerous islands. Even though they were aware of the existence of guerrilla units, the Japanese felt that they were firmly in control of the situation. There was a sense of optimism—quite unfounded as it turned out—that the Americans might bypass the southern Philippines as they left Japanese garrisons unmolested on other islands in the Pacific. The sen-

timent among the Japanese was one of general unconcern; even if the Americans decided to venture into the southern Philippines, they would probably be content to seize only the principal ports. The overall attitude of the Japanese garrisons in the southern Philippine islands was perhaps best summed up by a U. S. Army historian, who described the situation as follows:

The Japanese in the Southern Philippines, therefore, apparently felt quite secure if not downright complacent. Such an outlook would be dangerous enough if shared by first-class troops; it was doubly so when held by the types of units comprising the bulk of the forces in the southern islands. . . . Most of the Japanese units in the Southern Philippines had enough military supplies to start a good fight, but far from enough to continue organized combat for any great length of time. . . . As was the case in Luzon, the Japanese in the Southern Philippines, given their determination not to surrender, faced only one end—death by combat, starvation, or disease.⁴

What could happen when Japanese complacency was shattered was clearly illustrated on Palawan Island in mid-December 1944. Up to the autumn of 1944, the Japanese garrison numbering somewhat more than 1,000 men, had led a relatively peaceful existence, except for an occasional ambush by Filipino insurgents. Since the summer of 1942, about 300 American prisoners of war had worked on the construction of an airfield on Palawan. This field was eventually destroyed by American air attacks before it ever became of any major use to the enemy. As the pace of the campaign quickened and an invasion

⁴ Smith, *Triumph in the Philippines*, pp. 588–589.

of Palawan appeared imminent in mid-December, the Japanese garrison panicked and carried out a brutal massacre of the unarmed American prisoners of war. Many of them, huddled in trenches or shelters, were soaked with gasoline and burned to death, while others were bayoneted or shot in the stomach. A few of the Americans were able to escape their tormentors and eventually found their way back to American-held islands, where word of the atrocity was spread. But for most of the prisoners of war on Palawan, the eventual liberation of the island two months after the massacre came too late.⁵

ZAMBOANGA⁶

Marine aviation did not play any part in the conquest of Palawan, though the Thirteenth Air Force carried out extensive bombing and strafing operations during the two days preceding the landing. Results of these air attacks were limited by the absence of enemy installations and defenses. The landing itself was unopposed and the two airstrips on the island were seized within hours after the first troops had gone ashore. The Japanese garrison withdrew to the hill country in the interior and from there offered sporadic opposition, which continued well into the summer. Even

though work on airstrips near Iwahig and Puerta Princesa began at once, neither strip was ready for use by fighter and transport planes until 18 March. By that time, it was too late to provide air support for the invasion of Zamboanga, for that operation had already been launched on the 10th.

Participation of Marine aviation units in the VICTOR operations had already been decided upon in the course of February. Under the overall direction of the Thirteenth Air Force, MAGs-12, -14, -24, and -32 were slated to move south to Mindanao. The initial mission of MAGs-12, -14, and -32 was to provide direct air support to the 41st Infantry Division during the invasion of Zamboanga. General Kenney authorized the 1st MAW to reinforce the four Marine air groups with additional wing units from the northern Solomons.

The imminent liberation of the southern Philippines necessitated the employment of even more Marine aircraft. From his headquarters at Bougainville in the Solomons, General Mitchell, commander of 1st MAW and Commander Aircraft, Northern Solomons, controlled all aircraft in the area, except for a few Australian tactical reconnaissance planes. Since by late February of 1945, only few Marine squadrons were still operating in the Solomons, it was planned that responsibility for air operations in the Solomons-Bismarck Archipelago would in time be transferred to the Royal New Zealand Air Task Force.

In preparation for the invasion of Zamboanga, Marine air units from bases scattered between the northern

⁵ For a detailed account of this incident, see Eighth Army, *Palawan Ops*, pp. 44-48.

⁶ Additional sources for this section include: 1st MAW WarDs, Jan-Mar45; MAG-24 WarDs, Jan-Mar45; *TG 78.1 AR, Zamboanga, Mindanao, Philippines*; VMF-115 WarD, Mar45; VMB-611 WarD, Jul44-Nov45; *Philippines Comment File*; William F. McCartney, *The Jungleers, A History of the 41st Infantry Division* (Washington: Infantry Journal Press, 1948), hereafter McCartney, *41st InfDiv Hist*.

Solomons and the Philippines began to stage. Control of the staging was complicated by the fact that a number of aviation units had been broken up. As a result, by late February, the headquarters and service squadrons of MAG-12 still had not caught up with the air group, nor had the ground echelons of VMF-115, -211, -218, and 313 joined their flight echelons, which were engaged in combat operations on Leyte. The situation of MAG-14 was similar, with ground echelons of VMF-212, -222, -223, and -251 still en route to the Philippines in late February, even though the flight echelons of these squadrons had been operating from Samar since early January. MAG-61, commanded by Colonel Perry K. Smith, was still stationed on Emirau Island, north of the Solomons, where it was both undergoing final training in medium altitude bombing and employed for tactical operations against the Japanese on New Britain, New Ireland, and Bougainville. Like other Marine air groups, MAG-61 suffered from overdispersal. The headquarters and service squadrons, as well as VMB-413, -433, -443, and the flight echelon of VMB-611 were stationed on Emirau; VMB-423 occupied Green Island; the ground echelon of VMB-611 had departed Hawaii in late September 1944 and since then had remained aboard ship off Leyte, Samar, and Lingayen before finally going ashore on Mindoro on 25 February.

Additional Marine air units sent to assist in operations in the southern Philippines were Air Warning Squadrons 3 and 4 (AWS-3 and -4). The latter arrived off Leyte on 4 March

from Los Negros in the Admiralty Islands, while the former, coming from Bougainville, reached Mindoro on the 20th. As the date for the invasion of the Zamboanga Peninsula drew closer, a personnel change occurred when on 25 February, Colonel Verne J. McCaul relieved Colonel William A. Willis as commanding officer of MAG-12. General Mitchell charged Colonel Jerome of MAG-32 with overall command of Marine air units of MAGs-12, -24, and -32 scheduled to move to Zamboanga for participation in operations against Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago. From the island of Samar, MAG-14 was to support operations on Panay, Cebu, and Mindanao.

Before the assault against Zamboanga could be launched, steps had to be taken to assure that the primary objectives of the operation were met. The prime purpose of the seizure of the peninsula was to gain control of Basilan Strait which constitutes one of the two main approaches to Asia from the southwest Pacific. The peninsula featured good landing beaches and airfields protected by inaccessible mountains. The airstrips were located along the southeast coast near Zamboanga Town. Possession of Zamboanga would enable the Americans to establish additional air and naval bases for continued operations in the southern Philippines, particularly against eastern Mindanao.

On Zamboanga, as on other enemy-occupied islands in the Philippines, Filipino insurgents had gradually taken over small areas; on Mindanao, Negros, and Cebu half a dozen airstrips were in Filipino hands. When necessary, these airstrips were used by Army transport

aircraft, escorted by Marine Corsairs, to furnish the natives with supplies. About 150 miles to the northeast of Zamboanga Town, near the northern tip of the peninsula, the guerrillas were in possession of an airstrip near the town of Dipolog. (See Map 21). This airfield had been used since 1943 by Allied aircraft to supply guerrilla forces on the Zamboanga Peninsula.

As preinvasion plans for the assault against western Mindanao neared completion, Far East Air Forces reported on 2 March that the airfield on Palawan Island would not be completed in time for VICTOR IV, and it was decided to move one fighter squadron to Dipolog. Before the arrival of the fighters, however, it became necessary to provide adequate protection for the airfield. In a rapid change of original plans, and in order to forestall any Japanese attempt to seize the airfield from the guerrillas, two companies of the 24th Infantry Division, reinforced with two heavy machine gun platoons and one 81mm mortar section, were airlifted to Dipolog on 8 March, two days before the actual invasion date. The mission of this force was to defend the airfield, though they were not to take offensive action unless it became necessary to do so in maintaining uninterrupted air support.

This Army force, however, was not the first American contingent to arrive at Dipolog, for as early as 2 March MAG-12 ordered an advance echelon consisting of two officers and six enlisted men to move to the airstrip to prepare it as a staging base for guerrilla support missions in northwestern Mindanao. This move was completed on the following day. On 7 March, two Cor-

sairs arrived at Dipolog in order to support the guerrillas. By 9 March, a total of sixteen Corsairs were stationed at the field, all of them engaged in support of guerrillas or in flying missions in support of the imminent invasion. As far as was known to Eighth Army, "this was the first time that aircraft have operated from airdromes before securing them by an assault landing. The use of guerrilla-held airstrips proved to be a marked advantage in this operation."⁷

There were bizarre overtones to the activities of Marine aviators operating from an enemy-held island, as outlined in the following account:

Two planes from Dipolog reconnoitered the road from Dipolog to Sindangan. On the road about a mile north of Siari they sighted about 200 troops dressed as natives but all were carrying arms. The troops at the head of the column were carrying a large American flag. The planes buzzed the troops and the troops waved back. They also sighted four bancas (dugout canoes) about thirty to forty feet long just off Lanboyan Point. Upon returning to Dipolog and reporting their sightings, guerrilla headquarters informed them that the troops sighted were Japs, not guerrillas, and that the bancas were also Jap controlled.⁸

In a quick response to this information, the two Marine aviators took off again, and headed back to the scene of the earlier sightings. Five dugout canoes, under sail and occupied, were the first to be strafed. The planes then went after the troops and caught up with the column, which was plodding

⁷ Eighth Army, *Zamboanga-Sulu Archipelago Ops.*, p. 31.

⁸ MAG-12 WarD, Mar45.

along the road, still carrying the American flag. When the aircraft began to circle for a strafing run, the troops dropped the flag and headed for the bushes. The two pilots strafed the troops on the road, five pack carabaos, as well as bushes on either side of the road, using about 4,000 rounds of ammunition in the process. The foliage prevented any observation of results.

While Marine aircraft were operating with impunity from Dipolog under the very noses of the Japanese, an amphibious force under the command of Rear Admiral Forrest B. Royal, Commander of Naval Task Group 78.1, was en route to Mindanao. The invasion convoy carried the 41st Infantry Division, commanded by Major General Jens A. Doe, charged with making the assault landing. The prime mission of the naval task group was to transport the division from its staging areas on Mindoro and Leyte to the Zamboanga Peninsula and keeping it supplied after the landings. A secondary mission was the protection of the assault force against hostile naval action, although intelligence indicated that only motor torpedo boats and submarines would be encountered.

Included in the assault force were staffs and ground echelons of MAG-12 and -32, as well as AWS-4. The ground echelon of MAG-32, loaded in six LSTs, had left Luzon on 23 February and proceeded to Mindoro for staging. Ground crewmen of MAG-12 had boarded LSTs at Leyte and headed to Mindoro for staging. AWS-4 staged directly from Leyte Gulf on 8 March and joined the invasion convoy as it headed for western Mindanao. Among the Marines

headed for Zamboanga were the forward echelons of MAGs-12 and -32 consisting of operations, intelligence, and communications personnel under the command of Colonel Jerome.

The Thirteenth Air Force had commenced the preinvasion bombardment of the Zamboanga Peninsula as early as 1 March. From 4-8 March, the Army Air Forces concentrated on the destruction of enemy aircraft, personnel, and supplies in areas adjacent to Japanese airfields in Borneo, Davao, and Zamboanga. Planes from MAG-12, based at Dipolog, and Army aircraft provided air cover for the assault force as the ships approached the Zamboanga Peninsula. No opposition was encountered in the air.

Early on 10 March, a task force consisting of two light cruisers and six destroyers moved into Basilan Strait just off the southern tip of the Zamboanga Peninsula. This force began an intense bombardment of the beachhead area, which included a stretch of the coastline from Caldera Point to Zamboanga City and inland for a distance of 2,500 yards. As incessant air strikes hit the landing beaches and adjacent area to the north, the first infantrymen went ashore. The beaches, though heavily fortified, were not defended in strength and only moderately heavy machine gun fire greeted the assault units. Japanese defensive positions, although superior in layout and construction to any previously encountered in the Philippines, were in many instances unmanned.

By midmorning, the advancing infantrymen seized the first airstrip near Zamboanga Town. At noon, the 163d

Infantry Regiment, supported by a tank company, stood poised to assault the town itself. Except for a number of mines and booby traps that remained to be cleared, Zamboanga Town was firmly in American hands by late afternoon.

The initial objective of the Marine aviation personnel taking part in the landings was San Roque airfield, situated northwest of Zamboanga Town and only a mile inland from the invasion beaches. Heavy resistance encountered by the men of the 41st Infantry Division near the village of San Roque delayed capture of the airfield until 12 March, though Colonel Jerome and his staff were able to reconnoiter the strip on the day of the first landings. Personnel from MAGs-12 and -32 began unloading shortly before noon of J-Day, even though by this time the Japanese were shelling the beaches with artillery and mortars.

The 41st Infantry Division did not succeed in driving the Japanese entirely from the San Roque airstrip area until the afternoon of 13 March. At this time, the 973d Aviation Engineer Battalion moved in on the heels of the advancing infantry and work began around the clock to ready the field for operations. Upon arrival at San Roque airfield, the Marines promptly redesignated it as Moret Field in commemoration of a Marine aviator, Lieutenant Colonel Paul Moret, formerly commanding VMTB-131, who had been killed when a transport on which he was a passenger crashed on New Caledonia in 1943.

While work on Moret Field was in progress, aircraft from Dipolog flew patrol missions over the beach area and executed air strikes in support of the

infantry. As the soldiers advanced into the foothills to the north of Moret Field, Japanese resistance stiffened; elaborate booby traps also took their toll among the Americans. On 13 March the 163d Infantry Regiment suffered 83 casualties when the Japanese blew up a hill north of Santa Maria to the north of Zamboanga Town.⁹ Apparently the enemy had decided to explode a hidden bomb and torpedo dump and detonated it electrically when American troops had advanced up the hill in strength.

Japanese demolition experts also succeeded in throwing a scare into the Eighth Army commander following his inspection trip to Zamboanga. Just as General Eichelberger was preparing to return to the USS *Rocky Mount* and was passing through Zamboanga Harbor on a barge, the Japanese decided to give him a farewell salute. As the general himself described the incident:

Apparently enemy field glasses still accurately observed the harbor. Anyway, a detonator somewhere let loose a naval mine which sent a cascade of water ten stories high. It just missed my boat; after swallowing hard, I found myself intact and went aboard the cruiser. A Navy flying boat picked me up shortly after and took me back to Leyte in very stormy weather.¹⁰

During the time that Moret Field was being readied for operations, the Japanese remained passive in the air. The only exception occurred on 13 March, when a single enemy aircraft made two strafing runs over the field and dropped a bomb with negligible effect. Moret Field became operational on 15 March

⁹ McCartney, *41st Inf Div Hist*, p. 147.

¹⁰ Eichelberger and Mackaye, *Jungle Road to Tokyo*, p. 207.

with the arrival of eight Corsairs of VMF-115. By the 18th, the flight echelons of VMF-211, -218, and -313 had reached Zamboanga. The Army Air Forces 419th Night Fighter Squadron, equipped with P-61s, was also based at Moret Field.

As early as 12 March, Thirteenth Air Force had designated Colonel Jerome as Commander Air Groups, Zamboanga, Mindanao, hereafter referred to as Marine Aircraft Groups, Zamboanga (MAGsZam). Initially, Colonel Jerome's command included MAGs-12 and -32, though a month later MAG-24 joined the two air groups on Mindanao. One member of MAG-24, Lieutenant Colonel McCutcheon, had accompanied Colonel Jerome to Moret Field for the express purpose of establishing an organization similar to the one previously used at MAGsDagupan on Luzon.

As the infantry continued the advance into the interior of the Zamboanga Peninsula, enemy harassment of Moret Field decreased until it stopped altogether. The Corsairs of MAG-12 began to lend close air support on 17 March, when Captain Samuel H. McAloney, intelligence officer of MAG-32, was designated as commander of the support air party with the 163d Infantry Regiment. The primary mission of MAGsZam was close support of ground troops, though Marine Corsairs also maintained continuous convoy over friendly shipping in the Sulu Sea.

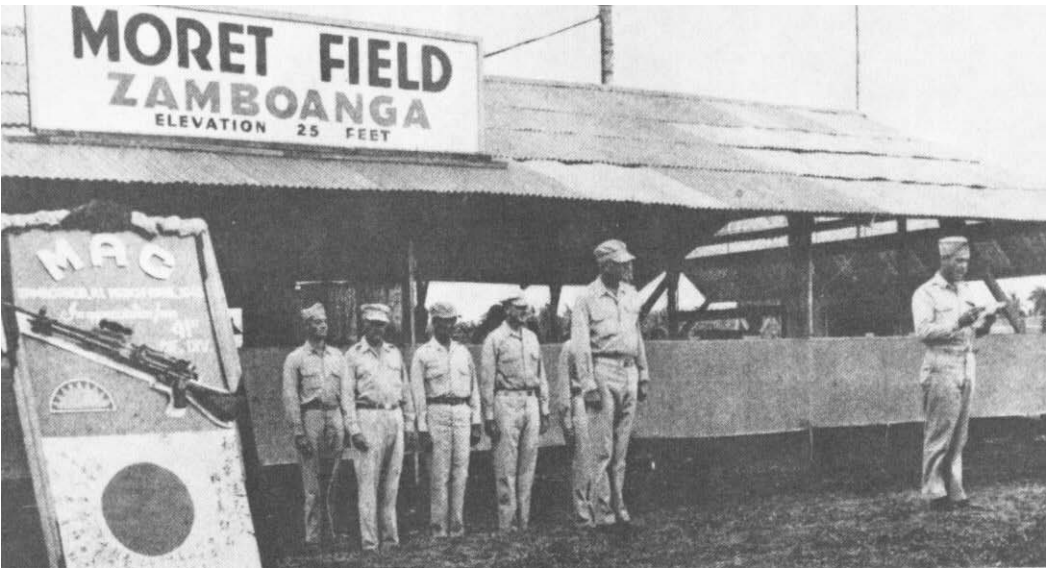
Marine organization for close air support at MAGsZam was simpler than it had been on Luzon, since Marine aviation had sole responsibility for the operation of Moret Field. In addition,

the regiments of the 41st Infantry Division requested air support directly from MAGsZam. The support air parties with the infantry consisted of a captain, one or more first lieutenants, two or more radio operators, and two or more radio technicians. Air-ground communication was carried on with two types of mobile radio gear. A large van with high frequency (HF) equipment with an effective range of more than 100 miles was used; where only distances of less than 15 miles had to be covered, more compact equipment was employed. The use of the van or jeep depended on the distance of the air support parties from MAGsZam, though there were many occasions when the two vehicles, working as a team, were employed. The radio jeep, in view of the limited range of its radio equipment, maintained contact with the communications van; the latter, in turn, acted as a relay with MAGsZam.

On the level below the air support party was the air liaison party consisting of a Marine aviator, a radio operator, and a technician. The liaison party was equipped with a radio jeep, maps and aerial photographs of the area in which it was to operate, as well as a field telephone which could be used in conjunction with the radio. Air-ground liaison was helped by the presence of AWS-4 at Moret Field. The latter unit, redesignated the 76th Fighter Control Center, had ample communications facilities. Beyond its mission of watching for approaching enemy aircraft and assisting friendly aircraft in getting back to the field, personnel of the air warning squadron employed their radio



LSTs land Marine aviation personnel and supplies on Zamboanga. (USMC 116824)



U.S. ARMY 41st Infantry Division honors Marine aviation for air support received in the Southern Philippines. (USMC 116887)

and radar equipment in supplementing the existing ground-air communications setup.

Marine aviators on the Zamboanga Peninsula flew their first air support missions at very close range, since the objectives invariably were located just a few miles from the runways of Moret Field. In a situation similar to that on Peleliu, Marine aviation personnel could watch the entire action from the runway. It was not unusual for a member of the air liaison party to scan the frontline before a mission, accompanied by the flight leader. The two Marines would then discuss the situation with the commander of the Army battalion involved, and the flight leader thus could receive a direct briefing as to the type of air support desired by the ground troops.

As the Japanese were driven back into the hills of Zamboanga, and Moret Field was further extended, additional aviation units began to arrive. The mission of the Marine dive bomber squadrons on Luzon came to a close on 23 March and VMSB-142 and -236 reached Moret Field on the following day. Despite an otherwise uneventful flight of the SBDs from Luzon to Zamboanga, this flight was to culminate in the death of two Marine aviators:

Fate decided this by the toss of a coin. Squadron procedure had two pilots assigned to one plane. Prior to departing from Luzon, it was decided to toss a coin to see who would fly to Zamboanga. Lt. Charles C. Rue and Lt. Charles F. Flock tossed, and Rue won the toss. On the flight down from Mangaldan, Rue broke an oil line and made a crash landing, on the supposedly guerrilla held air strip on Panay. Planes in the flight observed Rue and his gunner get out of their plane and

wave to a group of men who came out of the jungle at the edge of the strip. About six weeks later, when the Army invaded Panay, it was learned through interrogation of prisoners, that Rue and his gunner had been beheaded the day after they were taken prisoner.¹¹

Between 18 and 24 March, MAGsZam aircraft carried out their primary mission of supporting the 41st Infantry Division advance. Among the first air strikes was an attack by eight aircraft against the enemy dug in at Capisan, 3,500 yards north of Zamboanga Town. The planes dropped instantaneously fused 1,000 pound bombs on the assigned area, but results of the attack were unobserved. While strafing the entire area, the Marines drew light but accurate machine gun fire which damaged two of their aircraft. In a second strike on the same day, eight aircraft, each carrying a 175-gallon napalm fire bomb, attacked a ridge north of Zamboanga Town, where the enemy was dug in. Six napalm bombs covered the area; two failed to release; one of these was jettisoned over the water and the other was returned to base. After the strike, ground observers reported that the area of the target was well burned out and appeared lifeless and deserted.

As the Japanese were driven back into the inhospitable interior of Zamboanga, Marine aviators continued to carry out similar missions. In an innovation of close air support techniques, a support air party officer on 21 March relayed target information from an L-4 spotter plane to the air liaison party in a radio jeep on the ground; the lat-

¹¹ 1stLt Charles F. Flock ltr to CMC, n.d., in *Philippines Comment File*.

ter, in turn, coached the planes to the target. Positions indistinguishable from a fast moving Corsair thus could be easily pinpointed. The observer in the Cub plane remained over the target after the strike and reported excellent results. This was later verified by the commanding officer of the 1st Battalion, 162d Infantry Regiment, who reported that the enemy had withdrawn from the bombed area, blowing up two ammunition dumps and firing one warehouse on their way.

On 22 March, 16 Corsairs executed a concentrated attack on Japanese troops dug in on top of an L-shaped ridge 500 yards northwest of Masilay. The infantry had failed in the attempt to take the ridge on the preceding day. The planes dropped 13 quarter-ton bombs over the target without being able to observe the results of the bombing. However, when 2/162 resumed its advance, the infantrymen did not encounter any enemy opposition on the ridge. The battalion commander subsequently reported that an enemy pillbox had received a direct bomb hit and 63 Japanese dead had been counted by nightfall.

The remainder of March saw the continued advance of 41st Infantry Division troops into the interior of Zamboanga. As early as 26 March, MAG-32, in discussing the development of Moret Field, was able to make the following note:

This lower end of Zamboanga Peninsula has taken on a bustling, business-like air, and with the air strip in full operation, camps being built, engineering sheds being rushed to completion, mess halls going up, all Marine units are functioning at top speed to establish all the

elements of a fully equipped advance Marine Air Base.¹²

Except for the presence of an Army Air Forces night fighter squadron and a few Navy PBYs used for rescue work, Moret Field continued to remain under Marine control. Eventually, the field was to house a total of 299 aircraft: 96 F4Us, 151 SBDs, 18 PBJs, 18 SB2Cs, 2 F6Fs, 1 FM, 2TBFs, 5 R4Ds, and 6 Army P-61 "Black Widow" night fighters.¹³

Operations at Moret Field soon were going into high gear and MAGsZam aircraft extended their operations to adjacent islands in the Sulu Archipelago. Between 8 and 22 March, the guerrilla-held strip at Dipolog was occupied by a group of Marine ground personnel and an Army security detail. The grass strip even boasted a temporary fighter control center. Aircraft from MAGsZam became frequent visitors to Dipolog, flying in one day with supplies for the guerrillas, staying overnight, and returning to Moret Field on the following day.

On 27 March word was received at Moret Field that a force of about 150

¹² MAG-32 WarD, Mar45.

¹³ Figures cited from Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*, p. 316. Aircraft designations for abbreviations used above are as follows:

SBD — Douglas Dauntless dive-bomber
PBJ — Mitchell, North American medium bomber, identical to the Army Air Forces B-25

SB2C — Curtiss dive-bomber, "Helldiver"

F4U — Vought fighter-bomber, "Corsair"

F6F — Grumman fighter, "Hellcat"

FM — Martin fighter, "Wildcat"

TBF — Grumman torpedo-bomber, "Avenger"

R4D — Douglas utility or cargo plane, "Skytrain"

Japanese, armed with two grenade launchers, one light machine gun, two automatic rifles, and more than a hundred rifles was headed towards Dipolog and had advanced to within about 11 miles of the field.¹⁴ The guerrilla force of 400, commanded by Army Major Donald H. Wills, was armed but had never been in action before. Because of the potentially menacing situation, all American personnel were ordered to evacuate Dipolog on 27 March and left the field in the course of the day.

MAGsZam dispatched four aircraft to Dipolog to investigate conditions there. Though somewhat at variance in minor details with the official record, the comments of the division leader are of interest:

We sent a division of Corsairs to Dipolog in response to a request for air support. The tone of the message received at Zamboanga was that Dipolog was in imminent danger of falling, which we learned was not the case when we got there. The 500 to 600 Filipino guerrillas who opposed the Jap force were evidently keenly interested in avoiding a fight with the Japs. Major Wills evidently figured an air strike might boost their morale and damage the enemy at the same time.

The lack of maps or photos of any kind, as well as no way to mark targets and no communication with the troops all combined to dictate the method we used. Sharpe [1st Lieutenant Winfield S. Sharpe], as the smallest man in the division, was elected to sit on Major Wills' lap.¹⁵

Shortly thereafter, the aircraft took off. Sitting on the Army major's lap,

Lieutenant Sharpe led the four Corsairs in six strafing runs over the enemy positions while Major Wills pointed out the targets. The Japanese received a thorough strafing and were forced to pull back several miles. Having expended their ammunition, the Corsairs returned to Dipolog where Captain Rolfe H. Blanchard, the division leader, and Lieutenant Sharpe spent the night while the remaining two aircraft returned to Moret Field. Following his return to MAGsZam on 28 March, Captain Blanchard discovered that squeezing two men into the narrow confines of a Corsair cockpit did not meet with the wholehearted approval of his superiors. In the flight leader's own words:

I don't recall what happened to Sharpe for this incident, but I was mildly reprimanded by Lieutenant Colonel Leek of MAG-12, who acted as MAGSZAM Group Operations Officer, together with Lieutenant Colonel McCutcheon until the latter's departure from Moret Field and I learned (reliability of source unknown) that Major Wills was awarded the Silver Star.¹⁶

The existence of a Marine aviation group with two operations officers requires an explanation, which since the end of World War II has been furnished by Colonel Leek, who made the following comment:

The operations organization as it existed had been set up by LtCol Keith B. McCutcheon who, although the operations officer of MAG-24, had accompanied Colonel Jerome from Dagupan for the express purpose of placing into effect a command operations organization similar to the one at Dagupan. Once the organiza-

¹⁴ VMF-115 WarD, Flight Rpt No. 27, 27-Mar45.

¹⁵ Capt Rolfe H. Blanchard ltr to CMC, n.d., in *Philippines Comment File*.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

tion was functioning, LtCol Frederick E. Leek who had taken the advance echelon of MAG-12 into Zamboanga relieved LtCol McCutcheon. Although personnel were pooled, responsibilities can never be shared. LtCol Leek as senior of the two group operations officers functioned as MAGSZAM operations officer until he was detached, at which time (17May45) he was relieved by LtCol Wallace T. Scott of MAG-32.¹⁷

On 29 March, a ceremony was held in front of the operations tower on Moret Field. While the 41st Infantry Division band played, Colonel Jerome, with officers of the Marine air groups at attention behind him, received a plaque from General Doe, commanding the 41st Infantry Division. The plaque itself was spectacular in its own right. Six feet high by four feet, it was trimmed with captured Japanese naval signal flags. Mounted on it was a Japanese light machine gun, still showing the scars of battle. Below that was an enemy battle flag of white silk with the red "Rising Sun" of Nippon. Beneath it were listed the islands nearby which the division had invaded with Marine air support. At the top of the plaque were the words: "In Appreciation-41st Infantry Division."

Even more impressive for the Marines were the words of the Army division commander which accompanied the award. In addition to commending the air groups for the support of ground operations, General Doe had this to say:

¹⁷ Colonel Frederick E. Leek ltr to CMC, dtd 29Jan51, in *Philippines Comment File*. Upon being relieved, Lieutenant Colonel McCutcheon returned to MAG-24 and there became involved in planning for the Malabang landing. He went ashore at Malabang and set up operations for a third time. *McCutcheon ltr*.

The readiness of the Marine Air Groups to engage in any mission requested of them, their skill and courage as airmen, and their splendid spirit of cooperation in aiding ground troops have given this Division the most effective air support yet received in any of its operations.¹⁸

On 30 March, the already formidable Marine establishment at MAGsZam was further strengthened by the arrival of the flight echelon of VMSB-611 under the command of Lieutenant Colonel George H. Sarles. Prior to its arrival at Moret Field, the squadron had been stationed on Emirau Island in the St. Matthias Group. VMSB-611 was equipped with 16 Mitchell medium bombers (PBJs). Each of these aircraft was capable of carrying eight rockets, a bombload of 3,000 pounds, and anywhere between eight and fourteen .50 caliber machine guns. The bombers further contained airborne radar, an instrument panel for the pilot and copilot, as well as long-range radio and complete navigation equipment. The profusion of electronic gear made the PBJs particularly adaptable to operating at night and under conditions of poor visibility.

The versatility that Lieutenant Colonel Sarles expected from his pilots and planes became evident during intensive training on Emirau. His copilot, who remained with the squadron commander in preference to having a crew of his own, made this following comment about his commanding officer:

He wanted us to be able to play the role of fighters where fighters were needed, of bombers, of photographers, skip bombers,

¹⁸ Sgt E. Payson Smith, Jr., Marine Corps combat correspondent rpt, as cited in MAG-32 WarD, Mar45.

and indeed it seemed on some occasions that he thought we were capable of dive bombing. During the Philippine campaign we strafed, bombed, skip bombed, fired rockets, photographed, flew observers, were sent on anti-sub patrols, were sent up at night as night fighters, and bombed at medium altitudes. In fact, one member of VMB-611 shot down with his fixed guns, and using his bombsight as a gun-sight, a Japanese twin-engine light bomber, a "Lily."¹⁹

Shortly after their arrival at Moret Field, the PBJs began to fly long-range reconnaissance patrols over Borneo and Mindanao. They searched the seas for enemy submarines and photographed future landing sites in the Sulu Archipelago. Pilots of VMB-611 struck at enemy truck convoys and airfields at night and harassed the Japanese with nuisance flights. Use of the Mitchells made it possible for MAGsZam to conduct operations against the enemy around the clock.

Progress of the 41st Infantry Division advance across the Zamboanga Peninsula was a costly and time-consuming process. Operations on the peninsula continued until the latter part of June, which saw the end of coordinated enemy resistance, though infantrymen and guerrillas continued to ferret enemy stragglers out of the inaccessible hills and jungles long after that date. At the same time that Japanese resistance on Zamboanga was gradually reduced, a number of operations, many of them supported by Marine aviation, were executed in the southern Philippines. For many of the

enemy, the illusion that the islands which they garrisoned might be bypassed by the Americans, was effectively destroyed.

*SOUTHERN VISAYAS AND SULU ARCHIPELAGO*²⁰

The invasion of the Zamboanga Peninsula on 10 March 1945 represented only the first step in an entire series of amphibious landings designed to drive the Japanese out of the southern Philippines. Six days after the 41st Infantry Division set foot on Zamboanga, a company of the 162d Infantry of that division crossed Basilan Strait and went ashore on Basilan Island, 12 miles south of Zamboanga Town. Other islands in the vicinity were quickly captured against negligible enemy resistance.

Capture of Basilan Island marked the arrival of the first American troops in the Sulu Archipelago, a chain of islands extending southwestward from Mindanao toward Borneo. Even while the drive against the Sulu Archipelago got under way, two other divisions of the Eighth Army were assaulting additional islands in the central Philippines, particularly those islands surrounding the Visayan Sea. The assault on these islands—Panay, Negros, Cebu,

¹⁹ 1st Lieutenant Willis A. Downs ltr to CMC, dtd 23Jan51 in *Philippines Comment File*.

²⁰ Additional sources for this section include: Eighth Army Operational Monograph on the Panay-Negros Occidental Operation (VICTOR I), n.d., hereafter Eighth Army, *Panay-Negros Ops* (NARS, WWII Recs Div); Eighth Army Operational Monograph on the Cebu-Bohol-Negros Oriental Operation (VICTOR II), n.d., hereafter Eighth Army, *Cebu-Bohol-Negros Ops* (NARS, WWII Recs Div); *Philippines Comment File*; VMF-222 WarDs, Apr45-Jul46; VMF-223 WarDs, Apr45-Jul46; VMSB-236 WarDs, Mar-Apr45.

and Bohol—began with the invasion of Panay on 18 March when the 40th Infantry Division landed on the latter island unopposed. Following a brief destroyer bombardment the first assault wave hit the beach—to be greeted on shore “by men of Colonel Peralta’s guerrilla forces, dressed in starched khaki and resplendent ornaments.”²¹

The landing on Panay marked the beginning of the VICTOR I operations. Air support for the landings was provided by planes from three Marine fighter squadrons of MAG-14 based on Samar. Twenty-one Corsairs of VMF-222 patrolled over the beachhead during the day of the landings, though the enemy remained just as passive in the air as on the ground. The squadron’s only attack mission for 18 March was the strafing of six barges in the Iloilo River.

Pilots from VMF-251 searched the waters adjacent to the Panay beachheads for enemy shipping, but failed to find any trace of enemy activity. VMF-223 had the mission of neutralizing any Japanese air effort on adjacent Negros Island while the landings were in progress. The Corsairs swept down on six enemy airstrips on Negros during the day and destroyed two Japanese fighters. No lucrative targets ever materialized for the eager Marine aviators on Panay; the enemy kept to the woods and offered only weak resistance to the advancing infantry. The occupation of Panay largely resembled a major mop-up operation; just as most of the American forces on Panay had refused to surrender to the Japanese in 1942, so

now the Japanese commander, Lieutenant Colonel Ryoichi Totsuka, marched the 1,500 troops under his command into the hills, where they remained until the end of the war. By the end of June, U.S. Army casualties on Panay were about 20 men killed and 50 wounded.

On 26 March, VICTOR II got under way when the Americal Division landed on Cebu Island, about five miles southwest of Cebu City. Preceded by a devastating naval bombardment, leading waves of LVTs rolled onto the beach, where a nasty surprise awaited them. The first wave was abruptly halted when ten of the 15 landing vehicles were disabled by land mines. Several men were killed and others were severely injured as they stepped on mines while dismounting.

It was soon discovered that the existing beach defense was the most elaborate and effective yet encountered in the Philippines, even though the covering fire from prepared defenses was limited to small arms and mortar fire. The entire length of the landing beach bristled with mines ranging in size from 60mm mortar shells to 250-pound aerial bombs.

Subsequent waves of infantry unloaded on the beach, but made no attempt to move forward into the mined area. All along the shore, between the minefield and the water’s edge, men were crowded shoulder to shoulder, two and three deep. As they moved up and down the beach, unsuccessfully trying to find a clear opening, it became apparent that organization was breaking down and adequate control was lacking.²²

Eventually, the confusion on the beachhead subsided, and despite the

²¹ Eighth Army, *Panay-Negros Ops*, p. 37.

²² Eighth Army, *Cebu-Bohol-Negros Ops*, pp. 41–42.

lack of an adequate number of engineers, the troops pushed through after lanes were finally cleared. Behind the minefield, 50 yards inland in the palm groves, the assault force encountered continuous barriers; antitank ditches, log fences and walls, timber sawhorses, and steel rail obstacles all designed to block the advance of tracked or wheeled vehicles. Together with the minefields, these obstacles were covered by well-prepared firing positions which included concrete pillboxes having walls from seven inches to three feet thick, emplacements walled with one to four coconut logs, barbed wire, and a network of trenches.

Strangely enough, the presence of such formidable defenses did not induce the Japanese to vary their recently instituted strategy of withdrawing from the beach area and resisting the American invasion troops with a force only strong enough to be of nuisance value. The enemy reaction to the American assault on Cebu proved no exception to his earlier practice. Even the few Japanese who were left to man the prepared positions had been forced to abandon them by the intensive and concentrated bombardment of the beach area by American naval guns. "Had these installations been manned by even a small but determined force, the troops massing behind the mine field would have been annihilated and the eventual victory would have become far more costly."²³ As it was, enemy casualties on or near the invasion beaches the first day were 88 killed and 10 captured;

American losses were eight killed and 39 wounded.²⁴

As infantrymen of the Americal Division consolidated their beachhead on Cebu and advanced northward toward Cebu City, the Japanese began a hasty evacuation of the town. Throughout 26 March, Marine aviators of MAG-14 attacked enemy motorized columns and dismounted infantry headed for the hills northwest of Cebu City. Planes from VMF-222, -223, and -251 strafed the enemy with .50 caliber machine guns, destroying about 20 trucks and inflicting an undetermined number of casualties.

Japanese resistance on Cebu followed a familiar course. Unable to stem the American advance and severely harassed by American air, the enemy withdrew into the hills, from where he offered prolonged resistance. By late June numerous Japanese were still able to hide out in the hills, living a hunted existence, but ineffective as fighting groups.

Meanwhile, the American drive through the southern Philippines continued. Two days after the invasion of Cebu, troops of the 40th Infantry Division invaded Negros Island in a shore-to-shore operation from Panay. As on Cebu, the enemy withdrew into the hills, harassed by Marine aircraft and Filipino guerrillas. By mid-June, the Japanese on Negros no longer constituted an organized fighting force. A number of stragglers remained to lead a precarious existence, in which a struggle for survival in the hills was paramount.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

The isolation in which the remaining enemy troops in the southern Visayas found themselves is best illustrated by their ignorance of the end of the war. American leaflets dropped over enemy-held areas on Cebu by order of Major General William H. Arnold, commanding the Americal Division, informed the Japanese holdouts that the war was over and promised them fair treatment in accordance with the rules of the Hague and Geneva Conventions. On 17 August the Japanese replied with the following message:

We saw your propaganda of 16th August 1945; do not believe your propaganda. We request that you send to us a Staff Officer of General Yamashita in Luzon if it is true that Imperial Japanese surrendered to the Americans.²⁵

A further exchange of communications proved fruitless. The Japanese radio equipment on Cebu was out of order, and the holdouts had no way of getting direct information from Tokyo. Orders were issued to the effect that officers and men would be punished if they believed the American propaganda. The situation was clarified however, on 19 August, when the Japanese were able to repair one of the radio receivers and learned that Japan was in fact defeated. "There was no longer any doubt in their minds; their country was really defeated, so their only course of action was to surrender themselves to the Americans."²⁶ On Cebu, two lieutenant generals, a major general, and

an admiral surrendered, as did the remaining Japanese garrison of 9,000 men. The Americal Division and attached units had killed another 9,300 Japanese on Cebu and about 700 more on nearby Bohol and eastern Negros at a cost of 449 men killed and 1,872 wounded in action.

Throughout the VICTOR I and II operations in the southern Visayas, aircraft of MAG-14 gave all possible support to the ground troops. In addition to guerrillas who directed the Marine pilots to their targets, Army support air parties also were in operation on all of the newly invaded islands. The Thirteenth Air Force on Leyte directed MAG-14 by means of daily assignment schedules to report in for control to various support air parties. The Army Air Forces on many occasions furnished air coordinators in B-24s, which led the flights to the targets and pinpointed objectives. Despite poor weather, planes of MAG-14 flew a total of more than 5,800 hours during the month of April alone, an average of almost nine hours per day per plane.²⁷

By early May, the need for air support in the central Philippines had decreased and MAG-14 was transferred to the 2d Marine Aircraft Wing on Okinawa. The air group ceased combat operations on Samar on 15 May. Once more, Marine aviators had made a material contribution to the liberation of the Philippines. In paying tribute to the accomplishments of these Marine aviators, General Eichelberger expressed himself as follows:

²⁵ G-2 Periodic Rpt, HQ, Americal Div, dtd 18Aug45, as cited in Eighth Army, *Cebu-Bohol-Negros Ops*, p. 131.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

²⁷ Boggs, *Marines in the Philippines*, p. 119.

Marine Air Group Fourteen rendered an outstanding performance in supporting overwater and ground operations against the enemy at Leyte, Samar, Palawan, Panay, Cebu, and Negros, Philippine Islands. This group provided convoy cover, fighter defense, fire bombing, dive bombing and strafing in support of ground troops. The enthusiasm of commanders and pilots, their interest in the ground situation and their eagerness to try any method which might increase the effectiveness of close air support, were responsible in a large measure for keeping casualties at a minimum among ground combat troops.²⁸

Concurrently with operations in the southern Visayas, the drive into the Sulu Archipelago, a continuation of VICTOR IV, also gained momentum. On 2 April, elements of the 41st Infantry Division invaded Sanga Sanga in the Tawi Tawi Group at the extreme southern end of the Sulu Archipelago, 200 miles south of Zamboanga and 30 miles east of the coast of Borneo. The invasion force encountered only light opposition and, later in the day, launched a shore-to-shore assault against adjacent Bongao Island.

Both assault operations were supported by Marine aircraft. On 1 April, both islands had been heavily bombed and napalmed by Corsairs of VMF-115 and -313. The next day, on board the destroyer USS *Saufley*, Colonel Verne J. McCaul, commanding MAG-12, served as support air commander. The control room of the destroyer contained three air support circuits. One of these controlled the combat air patrol; another circuit was available for air-sea rescue

operations; a third was utilized for direction of support missions on the beach. In the course of both landings, as Marine fighters and bombers circled overhead, a radio jeep went ashore with the assault troops. This jeep contained the Marine air-ground liaison team headed by Captain Samuel McAloney as support air controller. As soon as the Marine team reached the beach, Captain McAloney took charge of the direction of the strike planes.

During the Bongao landings, 44 dive bombers from MAG-32 dropped 20 tons of bombs on the island. SBDs of VMSB-236 attacked an enemy observation post and troop concentrations. While the dive bombers were bombing such enemy objectives as they could locate, Corsairs from VMF-115 and -211 flew combat air patrol over Sanga Sanga. The Marine fighters attacked an enemy radio station with unobserved results. The Corsairs provided air cover for the invasion force until 8 April, when targets suitable for aerial bombing or strafing were no longer in evidence.

Even as the occupation of Sanga Sanga and Bongao Islands was progressing, bypassed Jolo Island to the north was drawing a lot of attention from the Marine aviators, who carried out daily raids. As early as 4 April, SBDs of VMSB-236 carried General Doe, commanding the 41st Infantry Division, and a member of his staff to Jolo Island on a reconnaissance mission. Following several reconnaissance flights by the division commander, all officers and senior noncommissioned officers of RCT 163 made similar flights over their landing beaches and zones of advance. This was possible because

²⁸ Eighth Army, Office of the CG, ltr, dtd 25Jun45, as cited in Boggs, *Marines in the Philippines*, pp. 120-121.

of the large Marine aircraft group at Zamboanga and the lack of Japanese air strength.

Jolo, situated 80 miles southwest from Zamboanga, was within easy range of Moret Field. Moro guerrillas had seized the initiative from the Japanese prior to the American landings. As a result the Japanese had been forced to withdraw into the interior, where they established their defenses on five mountains named Bangkal, Patikul, Tumatangas, Dato, and Daho.

On 9 April, elements of the 41st Infantry Division landed on Jolo Island in a shore-to-shore operation from Zamboanga. The Marine landing party, consisting of 5 officers and 11 men, was headed by Captain McConaughy. Lieutenant Colonel John Smith was support air commander and Captain McAloney was support air controller. The team was equipped with a radio-equipped truck and two similarly equipped jeeps. During the landing near Jolo Town, the Marine air liaison party was compelled to disembark the radio-equipped jeeps in four feet of water, because the Landing Ship, Medium (LSM), carrying these vehicles could not get close enough to the beach. The unexpected baptism in salt water played havoc with the radio gear, which had to be disassembled, carefully cleansed with fresh and sweet water, dried with carbon tetrachloride from fire extinguishers, and finally reassembled before it could be put back into operation. The radio truck landed somewhat later at a different beach without undue complications.

In the face of light enemy opposition, the 41st Infantry Division pressed onwards into the interior of the island.

Two of the Japanese hill strongholds, Mt. Patikul and Mt. Bangkal, were seized within 24 hours after the initial landings. The infantry advance was executed under a constant umbrella of Marine fighters and dive bombers. On the very first day of the Jolo operation, Marine aviators pummeled the enemy with 7,000 pounds of napalm, nearly 15 tons of bombs, and 18,200 rounds of ammunition.²⁰ In one day, Marine aviators knocked out nine enemy gun positions, razed two radio shacks and towers, and knocked out seven enemy-occupied buildings and personnel areas.

The infantry advance into the interior of Jolo Island met its first strong resistance at the approaches to Mt. Dato. Nevertheless, this enemy strongpoint fell on 12 April. Mt. Daho, six miles southeast of Jolo Town, loomed as the next major obstacle in the path of the advancing infantry. This formidable strongpoint with an elevation of 2,247 feet was of historical significance, for about four decades earlier Americans had fought the Moros on this mountain. It was estimated that about 400 *Special Naval Landing Force* troops were entrenched on Mt. Daho, equipped with nine dual 20mm guns, as well as heavy and light machine guns.

The attack against Mt. Daho began on 16 April, when infantrymen and Filipino guerrillas ran into a veritable hail of fire from the Japanese defenders, who were using connecting trenches, pillboxes, and dugouts to best advantage. The preliminary bombardment of the Japanese strongpoints by aircraft and artillery proved inade-

²⁰ MAG-12 WarD, Apr45.

quate and the advance stalled. For the next four days, artillery and Marine aviation took turns in softening up the enemy, who obviously was determined to make his last stand here. On 18 April, 27 SBDs of VMSB-243 and 18 SBDs of VMSB-341 from Moret Field dropped over 21 tons of bombs on the enemy under the direction of the Support Air Party. On the following day, 47 SBDs of VMSB-236 and 18 SBDs of VMSB-243 continued the neutralization of the enemy on Mt. Daho. Of the results achieved, the ground forces reported: "Of 42 bombs dropped this morning, 35 were exactly on the target. Remainder were close enough to be profitable."³⁰

By 20 April it seemed that Mt. Daho was ripe for a direct assault. As the infantrymen edged their way up the hill, they were halted by a hail of fire which killed 3 men and wounded 29.³¹ Once more, the attack was halted as artillery and supporting aircraft shelled, bombed, and strafed the obstinate holdouts. In the course of 21 April, 70 SBDs dropped more than 15 tons of bombs on enemy positions at Mt. Daho. As night fell, the artillery began to saturate the target area.

Early on 22 April, 33 SBDs from VMSB-142, -243, and -341 and four rocket-firing Mitchell bombers (PBJs) of VMB-611 attacked Japanese positions on Mt. Daho. Again, the infantry jumped off for the attack on the stronghold. This time, the attack carried the hill. Speaking of the final assault, the division historian made the following comment:

The combined shelling and bombing was so effective that the doughboys were able to move forward at a rapid pace without a single casualty. The area was found littered with bodies of 235 Japs and it was believed that many more had sealed themselves into caves and blown themselves to bits. This broke the Jap stand in this sector and the few enemy troops that escaped from Mt. Daho wandered aimlessly in small groups and were easy prey for roving guerrilla bands.³²

Fighting on Jolo Island continued until well into the summer of 1945, but the capture of Mt. Daho had broken the backbone of the enemy defense. Control of Jolo provided the Americans with the best port in the Sulu Archipelago; it also marked the completion of the drive into the archipelago.

MINDANAO³³

One more operation was required to bring all of the southern Philippines under Allied control. This operation was VICTOR V, the seizure of Mindanao, southernmost and second largest island in the Philippines. This island, measuring 300 miles from north to south and about 250 miles from east to west at its widest point, had a population of nearly two million just before the outbreak of World War II. Even

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

³¹ Additional sources for this section include: CG, X Corps, History of X Corps on Mindanao, 17April-30June45, hereafter *X Corps Mindanao Hist*; VMSB-241 WarD, May45; VMB-611 WarDs, Jul44-Nov45; John A. DeChant, *Devilbirds—The Story of United States Marine Corps Aviation in World War II* (New York and London: Harper & Brothers, 1947), hereafter DeChant, *Devilbirds*.

³⁰ MAG-32 WarD, Apr45.

³¹ McCartney, *41st InfDiv Hist*, p. 152.

though the Zamboanga Peninsula technically is part of the Mindanao mainland, "the peninsula, for purposes of military planning, was not considered part of Mindanao at all."³⁴ Hence, because of the forbidding mountain barrier separating eastern Mindanao from the Zamboanga Peninsula, a separate invasion of the eastern portion of the island had to be instituted despite the presence of American forces on Zamboanga since 10 March 1945.

Prior to the VICTOR V operation, enemy strength on Mindanao, less Zamboanga, was estimated at 34,000. Of this number, 19,000 were combat troops; 11,000 were service troops; an estimated 3,000-5,000 poorly armed Japanese civilians, conscripted residents of Mindanao, made up the rest of the garrison.³⁵

Responsibility for the Mindanao operation was assigned to the X Corps, commanded by Major General Franklin C. Sibert. Capture of the island was to be carried out by the 24th and 31st Infantry Divisions, which were to invade the west coast of Mindanao near Malabang and Parangon 17 April 1945. Task Group 78.2, under the command of Rear Admiral Albert G. Noble, furnished the amphibious lift, convoy escort, and naval gunfire support for the X Corps en route from staging areas on Mindoro, Leyte, and Morotai to Mindanao.

Despite the impressive size of the Japanese garrison on Mindanao, the invasion force could count on assistance from guerrilla forces on the island, which "were the most efficient and best

organized in the Philippines."³⁶ These Filipinos were commanded by Colonel Wendell W. Fertig, a former American engineer and gold miner, who had turned guerrilla after the fall of the Philippines and built up an effective insurgent force. Fertig had maintained radio communications with MacArthur's headquarters ever since the summer of 1942 and, from 1943 onwards, had been the recipient of supplies brought in first by submarine and later by air or small vessels. The presence of an insurgent force in the enemy rear began to pay dividends even before the first X Corps troops landed on Mindanao. Prior to the invasion force's move towards the island, Colonel Fertig's guerrilla force had been attacking the Japanese garrison at Malabang, with the support of Marine aircraft from Moret Field.

By 5 April, following the expulsion of the enemy from Malabang and vicinity by the guerrillas, Marine aircraft started to operate from the Malabang airstrip. "As the front lines were then less than a half mile from the airstrip, Marine pilots visited ground observation posts for briefing, and after studying enemy defenses, flew a mere 800 yards before releasing their bombs on primary hostile targets."³⁷

Nor were these Marine air strikes in support of the guerrillas all the Japanese had to worry about. For six days prior to the American landings on Mindanao, heavy bombers hit Cagayan, Davao, Cotabato, Parang, and Kabanacan, some of the more important towns

³⁴ Eichelberger and Mackaye, *Jungle Road to Tokyo*, p. 216.

³⁵ *X Corps Mindanao Hist.*, p. 6.

³⁶ Eichelberger and Mackaye, *Jungle Road to Tokyo*, p. 217.

³⁷ *X Corps Mindanao Hist.*, p. 53.

on the island. At the same time medium bombers struck Surigao, Malabang, Cotabato, and the Sarangani Bay area. Dive bombers hit pinpointed targets, while fighters carried out several sweeps daily over the roads and trails throughout the island.

The official Army history has described the situation of the Japanese in the immediate area of the contemplated landings as follows:

By the 11th of April the last Japanese had fled toward Parang and the guerrillas had completed the occupation of the entire Malabang region. On 13 April Colonel Fertig radioed Eighth Army that X Corps could land unopposed at Malabang and Parang and that the Japanese had probably evacuated the Cotabato area as well.⁸⁸

In addition to the assistance furnished to the guerrillas on Mindanao by aircraft from MAGsZam, the Thirteenth Air Force, reinforced by elements of the Fifth Air Force and the Royal Australian Air Force Command, had carried on a continuous air offensive of neutralizing enemy air, ground, and naval forces, and to prevent Japanese reinforcements and supplies from reaching the objective area. Fifth Air Force, commanded by Major General Ennis C. Whitehead, had the specific mission of providing aerial reconnaissance, photography, and providing air cover for the convoys and naval forces. The Allied Forces had done their job well. As the time for the invasion of Mindanao approached, little was left of the 1,500 enemy aircraft once assumed to have been stationed on Mindanao. The actual measure of the destruction

of the Japanese Air Force was evident by the number of Japanese aircraft that were to make an appearance over the island during the VICTOR V operation. Throughout the campaign, only five enemy aircraft were sighted over Mindanao. Even though the enemy controlled two dozen airstrips on the island, American air supremacy was complete.

As soon as possible after X Corps had gone ashore on Mindanao, MAG-24 was to be flown from Luzon to the Malabang airstrip, situated 150 miles east of Moret Field. Upon its arrival on Mindanao, MAG-24 was to operate under the direction of Colonel Jerome as part of MAGsZam in an organizational scheme closely resembling that previously existing on Luzon.

Since the guerrillas appeared to be in firm control of the Malabang area, the landing force sent to Malabang was reduced from a division to one battalion. Instead, the main assault was made at Parang, 17 miles to the south. This decision, which involved changing the entire assault plan at sea, was reached after Lieutenant Colonel McCutcheon of MAG-24 had personally reconnoitered the Malabang area several days before the landings. The Marine aviator conferred with guerrilla leaders on the ground and, accompanied by one of them, Major Rex Blow, an Australian who had been captured by the Japanese at Singapore and who subsequently had found his way to the Philippines, flew back to Zamboanga. These two men proceeded by small boat to join the Mindanao-bound invasion convoy on the afternoon of 16 April. "Information these two men furnished

⁸⁸ Smith, *Triumph in the Philippines*, p. 621.

to the X Corps commander, firmed the decision to land at Parang rather than Malabang."³⁹

The landings at Parang proceeded without incident early on 17 April, following an unnecessary two-hour cruiser and destroyer bombardment. Fighters, dive bombers, and medium bombers from Moret Field maintained vigil over Parang and Malabang. Incessant sweeps over the highways of Central Mindanao kept the movement of enemy troops to a minimum. An Army Air Forces air support party, in direct contact with the Marine pilots, directed the aircraft to targets that included enemy supply dumps, troop concentrations, and installations. Eighteen dive bombers of VMSB-341 and 17 SBDs of VMSB-142 circled over the beachheads, subject to call by the support air party. At the same time, 20 Corsairs of VMF-211 flew combat air patrol over the beaches; another 10 Corsairs from VMF-218 protected the cruiser force offshore.

First Marine unit ashore at Parang was AWS-3, which landed at noon and set up radio equipment on the beach. VMSB-244 personnel landed at Parang along with the main body of X Corps. The remainder of the Marine aviation units landed later in the day three miles north of Malabang Field. Movement of personnel and equipment to the airstrip was impeded by heavy rains, muddy roads, and bridges which had been demolished by guerrillas or the withdrawing enemy. In the words of the U.S. Army X Corps commander: "As

to bridges, they had been destroyed by guerrillas time and again until I don't believe there was a highway bridge intact in the whole island."⁴⁰

With the help of Army engineers, Malabang Field was readied for the flight echelon of MAG-24. When the first planes of MAG-24 arrived from Luzon on 20 April, the pilots and crews found an engineering line already set up and a camp area beginning to take shape. First of the dive bomber squadrons to arrive was VMSB-241, followed by VMSB-133 and -244 during the following two days. The Marines renamed the airstrip Titcomb Field in honor of Captain John A. Titcomb who had been killed while directing an air strike on Luzon.

On 21 April, AWS-3, meanwhile redesignated as the 77th Fighter Control Center, assumed fighter direction and local air warning responsibility from the control ship. The air warning squadron's radio and radar equipment operated around the clock; personnel monitored two radar search sets, in addition to eight different radio channels at various frequencies in the high frequency and very high frequency bands.⁴¹

⁴⁰ MajGen Franklin C. Sibert, USA, ltr to Head, HistBr, G-3 Div, HQMC, dtd 24Oct66, in *Philippines Comment File*.

⁴¹ HF band is an arbitrary designation for frequencies in the radio spectrum between 3 and 30 megacycles; VHF comprises that part of the spectrum between 30 and 300 megacycles. Over the years, the concept of what constitutes high, very high, ultra high, and extremely high frequencies had undergone

³⁹ Boggs, *Marines in the Philippines*, p. 126.

The advance of the 24th and 31st Infantry Divisions towards the east coast of Mindanao near Davao and towards the southeastern tip of the island towards Sarangani Bay made good progress in the days following the invasion. On 22 April, MAG-24 initiated operations from Titcomb Field to support the advance of the Army divisions, one day ahead of schedule. Technically, MAG-24 came under the control of MAGsZam. In practice, because of the distance between Moret and Titcomb Fields, MAG-24 operated practically as a separate unit. Night fighters and local combat air patrols for Titcomb Field were made available by MAGsZam to MAG-24 from aircraft stationed at Moret Field.

The operations of MAG-24 on Mindanao differed considerably from those of Marine aviators elsewhere in the Philippines. The X Corps retained control of the air support strikes because of the distances support aircraft had to fly to provide support and the existence of two separate Marine air groups, not including elements of the Thirteenth Air Force which furnished heavy strikes. The circumstance that the two infantry divisions were operating in widely separated zones, plus the necessity of close coordination with the guerrillas, all combined to make a centralized control indispensable.

considerable change. During the early years of radio, frequencies above two megacycles were generally considered useless for communications. During World War II, frequencies up to 600 megacycles were used, primarily for radar in the high end of the spectrum.

To facilitate close control over air strikes, support air parties were attached to X Corps and the two infantry divisions. The support aircraft officer worked closely with the division air officer and provided communications facilities for direct support requests. In addition to the support air parties, the Army 295th Joint Assault Signal Company (JASCO) made available 12 forward air control teams equipped with short-range radio gear mounted in jeeps for air-ground communication. These teams were apportioned between the two infantry divisions for the primary purpose of directing close support strikes.

The technique employed on Mindanao was unusual in other respects. Due to the organizational setup, a constant air alert was maintained overhead to minimize the delay between requests for air support and the actual strikes. JASCO teams were used throughout the Mindanao campaign. With the support air parties thus reinforced, there was no need to shuffle the JASCO teams from one line unit to the other as strikes were required. Instead, a battalion commander could request air support with reasonable assurance that the strike would be carried out without undue delay.

As the two infantry divisions of X Corps advanced across Mindanao, SBDs from Titcomb and Moret Fields ranged ahead of the Army troops, driving the enemy from roads and villages in the path of the American advance. Despite demolished bridges and sporadic resistance, the advance of the ground forces proceeded ahead of schedule. On 27 April, the 24th Infantry Division seized

Digos on the east coast of Mindanao and pivoted northward towards Davao; the capital city of the island fell on 3 May, after the infantry had covered a distance of 145 miles in 15 days. The 31st Infantry Division, advancing northward through the Mindanao Valley seized Valencia on 16 May and Malaybale several days later.

Marine aviators employed napalm bombs for the first time on Mindanao on 30 April, when they were dropped on an enemy held hill near Davao. The results of this attack were such, that, according to an official Army account:

From this time on, fire from the air was available, with strikes as large as thirty-two 165 gallon tanks being dropped on a target. In several instances, entire enemy platoons were burned in their positions and in other cases, flaming Japanese fled from positions, only to encounter machine gun fire from ground troops.⁴²

On 8 May, three SBDs of VMSB-241 and eight dive bombers from VMSB-133 flew a spectacular strike against an enemy strongpoint west of Sayre Highway opposite Lake Pinalay. At this point, elements of the 124th Infantry Regiment, 31st Infantry Division, were encountering heavy enemy resistance. Since the weather was closing in, and the opposing forces were only about 200 yards apart, there was a great risk involved to the friendly troops in obtaining close support. Nevertheless, such support was forthcoming in what the Marine pilots subsequently termed "the closest support mission yet flown by VMSB-241."⁴³ Yellow panels were employed to indicate friendly po-

sitions. The target was marked with smoke, and nine SBDs, in a neat example of precision bombing, unloaded nearly five tons of bombs within the 200 yard area. The Japanese position was completely eliminated. The grateful commander of 3/124 requested the Marine ground controller to radio the following message to the Marine pilots:

Jojo (133) and Dottie (241) flights gave finest example of air-ground coordination and precision bombing I have ever seen. Debris from the bombs fell on our men but none was injured.⁴⁴

As the 24th Infantry Division approached Davao, the normal combat air patrol was increased from three to six aircraft. At the same time, an intensive effort was under way to break up the Japanese defensive positions near the city. As a result, the pace reached between 150 and 200 sorties a day. The largest number of strikes in one day involved 245 aircraft, dropping 155 tons of bombs.⁴⁵ Attempts by Marine aviators to have close air support gain the acceptance of the ground troops had by this time come full circle. As early as the drive through the Sulu Archipelago, one observer noted:

. . . the sight of the jeeps with their Marine insignia was a matter of course to the infantrymen. Close air support was no longer novel or a matter of unusual interest to the soldiers. It was always there. It always worked. It was now just a part of the first team.⁴⁶

Far from having to fight for acceptance, some Marine pilots on Mindanao found that "the infantry was apt to call

⁴² *X Corps Mindanao Hist.*, p. 56.

⁴³ VMSB-241 WarD, May45.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *X Corps Mindanao Hist.*, p. 56.

⁴⁶ De Chant, *Devilbirds*, p. 197.

for planes to hit a pin-point target that any hard-driving rifle squad could have taken. However, such enthusiasm was much preferred to indifference."⁴⁷

During the latter part of May, Japanese resistance in the mountains east of the Sayre Highway stiffened appreciably. Even though, by this time, the X Corps operations on Mindanao had entered the mop-up and pursuit phase, rough terrain and poor trails in the mountainous regions of the island hampered the advance of the infantry. At the same time, heavy rains curtailed aerial observation of Japanese activity. As American troops advanced farther into the mountains, the enemy began to fight doggedly for every inch of ground.

In order to drive the Japanese from one of their strongholds, Marine dive-bomber pilots tried out yet another tactic on 1 June. This new method involved the saturation bombing of a very small area. No less than 88 SBDs attacked an enemy troop concentration and gun positions with a variety of bomb loads, including napalm. No enemy fire greeted the advancing infantrymen, who had expected to encounter stubborn resistance.

The stage for the biggest air strike on Mindanao was set when, on 19 June, a 31st Infantry Division artillery spotter aircraft observed large contingents of enemy troops moving into the Umayam River Valley in northern Mindanao. On the following morning, additional liaison aircraft flew over the area and reaffirmed the presence of enemy concentrations, but unfavorable weather precluded any offensive action

from the air. On 21 June, all Marine aircraft that could be spared were requested to hit this area. Airborne coordinators in artillery spotter planes directed 148 dive bombers and fighter bombers to the target. During a four-hour period, the planes unloaded 75 tons of bombs on bivouac areas, supplies, buildings, and marching troop columns. Because of inclement weather, observation of results was limited; nevertheless, a number of large fires were clearly visible, bodies were observed floating in the river, and individual Japanese could be seen fleeing before the strafing aircraft. Subsequent reports indicated that about 500 Japanese were killed in this attack.

Despite bad weather and occasionally fanatical enemy resistance in the mountains of central and northern Mindanao, the handwriting was on the wall for the Japanese remaining on the island. On 30 June, General Eichelberger declared the eastern Mindanao operation completed and reported to General MacArthur that organized opposition on the island had ceased. Actually, isolated Japanese units were to continue fighting right up to the end of the war, and during the period 30 June through 15 August, American and Filipino guerrilla units killed 2,235 Japanese in addition to the more than 10,000 enemy killed on Mindanao prior to 30 June.⁴⁸ U.S. Army casualties through 15 August had numbered 820 killed and 2,880 wounded.⁴⁹ Among the Marine aviators who did not survive the Mindanao operation was Lieutenant Colonel Sarles, the energetic commander of VMB-611,

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Smith, *Triumph in the Philippines*, p. 647.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 648.

whose PBJ failed to pull up after a low level attack on the Kibawe Trail in northern Mindanao on 30 May.⁵⁰

During the period of 17 April through 30 June, Marine aviators flew a total of 10,406 combat sorties in support of X Corps, and dropped a total of 4,800 tons of bombs. Nearly 1,300 five-inch rockets were fired in low level attacks against Japanese installations during the same period.⁵¹ From the first strategic attack until the final Japanese defeat, more than 20,000 sorties of all types of aircraft were flown in support of the Mindanao Campaign.⁵²

On 12 July, Marine aviators in the Philippines carried out their last major support mission of the war when they flew cover for an amphibious landing team of the 24th Infantry Division at Sarangani Bay in southern Mindanao. With few exceptions, Marine and Allied aircraft had exhausted all profitable targets by mid-July. As far as the liberation of the Philippines was concerned, Marine aviation had fully achieved the objective it had set for itself: close air support that was consistently effective, and a menace only to the enemy.

CONCLUSION OF PHILIPPINE OPERATIONS⁵³

By late April 1945 the main objectives of American operations in the

Philippines had been accomplished: MacArthur's forces had seized strategic air bases which could be used to deny the enemy access to the East Indies; at the same time, American forces had gained control of bases in the Philippines from which an invasion of Japan could be mounted. In addition, the Allied advance through the Philippines had freed the majority of Filipinos from Japanese occupation. In a futile attempt to stem the American advance through the Philippines, the Japanese had sacrificed more than 400,000 of their troops.⁵⁴ When the war ended, more than a 100,000 Japanese—including noncombatant civilians—still remained in the archipelago. While the main body of American troops were preparing for an assault against Japan proper, the remnants of erstwhile proud Japanese garrisons in the Philippines were reduced to impotence and forced to forage for scraps to keep themselves alive, hunted by Americans and Filipinos alike.

For Marine aviators in the Philippines, the summer of 1945 brought changes both in personnel and equipment. On 1 June, Colonel Lyle H. Meyer turned over the command of MAG-24 to Colonel Warren E. Sweetser, Jr.⁵⁵ Two days later, after 26 months' service in the Pacific Theater, General Mitchell relinquished his command of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing and AirNorSols

⁵⁰ VMB-611 WarD, May45.

⁵¹ X Corps Mindanao Hist., p. 57.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Additional sources for this section include: 1st MAW WarDs, 1945; Robert Debs Heinl, Jr., *Soldiers of the Sea—The United States Marine Corps, 1775–1962* (Annapolis: United States Naval Institute, 1962), hereafter Heinl, *Soldiers of the Sea*; George Odgers, *Air War*

Against Japan, 1943–1945—Australia in the War of 1939–1945, series 3, Air, v. II (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1957), hereafter Odgers, *Air War Against Japan*.

⁵⁴ Smith, *Triumph in the Philippines*, pp. 651–652.

⁵⁵ MAG-24 WarD, Jun45.

to Major General Louis E. Woods who, as a lieutenant colonel, had organized and commanded the wing at Quantico during the summer of 1941. General Woods was to recall:

... I arrived at Headquarters, AirNorSols before lunch and about 3 p.m. I received immediate orders to proceed to Guam and report in person to Admiral Nimitz. I left later that night so that I would arrive in Guam at about seven o'clock when his Headquarters opened. I reported to him personally, was briefed by him, and ordered by him to proceed at once to Okinawa and relieve General Mulcahy. I doubt if I was in command of AirNorSols more than five hours.⁶⁶

Upon his arrival on Okinawa, General Woods took over the 2d Marine Aircraft Wing. Colonel Harold C. Major, who had succeeded General Woods in command of the 1st Wing, held the post for only four days. On 10 June, Brigadier General Lewie G. Merritt arrived on Bougainville to take command. Two months later to the day, General Merritt, in turn, was relieved by Major General Claude A. Larkin, who was initially scheduled to take the 1st Wing into Kyushu once the invasion of the Japanese home islands got under way.

Other Marine aviators who had been instrumental in gaining acceptance for Marine close air support operations were caught up in the reshuffling of personnel. On 4 July, Colonel Jerome turned over his command of MAG-32 and MAGsZam to Colonel Stanley E. Ridderhof and returned to the United States. Six weeks later, on 17 August,

Colonel Verne J. McCaul assumed command of MAGsZam.

The rapid turnover of personnel was accompanied by a similar reshuffling of Marine aviation units. On 1 August, the dive bomber squadrons of MAG-32, VMSB-133, -236, and -241 were decommissioned. Three days later, Headquarters of the 1st MAW and MAG-61 (including VMB-413, -423, -433, and -443), were ordered by Far East Air Forces to proceed from Bougainville to Zamboanga. Two weeks after the Japanese surrender, MAGsZam was dissolved; operational control of Moret Field and the air defense of Mindanao was turned over to the Army Air Forces 13th Fighter Command, effective 1 September. The end of the war saw numerous Marine aviation units in the process of being decommissioned; only a few Marine squadrons were to remain in the Philippines. The 1st Marine Aircraft Wing would shortly move to Okinawa, and from there into China.

Even as units and personnel in the Philippines were undergoing major changes, the SBDs, long the mainstay of Marine dive bombing, were also making their exit. On 16 July, in a formal ceremony at Titcomb Field, Colonel Warren E. Sweetser, commanding MAG-24, bid farewell to the Douglas Dauntless dive bombers, which had rendered such faithful service to the Marine Corps from the first day of the war to almost the end. Several days later, the SBDs were ferried to Cebu for final disposition by the Navy.⁶⁷ Only VMSB-244, equipped with the

⁶⁶ LtGen Louis E. Woods ltr to Head, HistBr, G-3 Div, HQMC, dtd 25Nov66, in *Philippines Comment File*.

⁶⁷ 1st MAW WarD, Jul45.

new SB2C Helldivers, remained operational within MAG-24.

For the 1st MAW and Marine aviation in general, the employment of Marine aircraft in the Philippines marked the end of a lengthy period in which the Marines had believed, with some validity, that they were being left out of major operations in the Pacific Theater. In this feeling they were not alone, for Australian flying units expressed similar discontent at being assigned missions against long bypassed Japanese which they considered costly and nonessential.⁵⁸

For Marine aviation, the Philippines campaign represented a unique opportunity to improve on a doctrine of air support that had been born long ago in the jungles of Central America. Earlier in World War II, there had been air support provided to ground forces by Marines. However, this air support had left something to be desired; a doctrine had not yet been evolved and techniques were yet to be refined. One Marine observer put it into the following words:

Although there had been jury-rigged, prearranged airstrikes on Guadalcanal (some even involving depth charges as bombs), effective close air support never developed, nor did subsequent air support ventures in the undistinguished New Georgia campaign provide much encouragement.⁵⁹

On Bougainville, it was Lieutenant Colonel John T. L. D. Gabbert, air officer of the 3d Marine Division, who

began to study ways to make close air support more effective. Marine aviators proved at Hellzapoppin' Ridge what their close support capabilities were. Prior to the invasion of the Philippines, Lieutenant Colonel McCutcheon with the benefit of improved radio equipment that had meanwhile become available, adapted his own and Gabbert's experiences as a further step in evolving a sound doctrine of Marine style aviation close support. That this technique, so often vindicated towards the end of the Second World War, really worked is attested to by many letters of commendation and gratitude from commanders of ground forces benefiting from such support. Though the Marine doctrine has come under attack from various quarters, during World War II and since, the comments of the ground forces themselves provide the most eloquent testimony in its favor. On this subject, the official U.S. Army history of the Philippine campaign has this to say:

Ground combat units that at one time or another had close support from both U. S. Army and U. S. Marine Corps Aviation were virtually unanimous in preferring the latter, at least during the earlier months of the campaigns. Later, when Fifth Air Force units became more experienced in close ground support activity and began to work more closely with the ground combat forces, confidence in the Army's air arm grew. Nevertheless, the campaign ended with almost all ground units still hoping for an improved, more effective air-ground liaison system insofar as Army air echelons were concerned, and also seeking methods by which to establish a closer, more effective working relationship between the Army's ground and air units.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ For a detailed discussion of this situation, see Odgers, *Air War Against Japan*, pp.386-390.

⁵⁹ Heinl, *Soldiers of the Sea*, p. 386.

⁶⁰ Smith, *Triumph in the Philippines*, p. 655.

Towards the end of the campaign in the Philippines, more than 30 letters of gratitude and commendation were directed to Marine aviation units from General MacArthur down to Army division commanders.⁶¹ Perhaps General Eichelberger has summed it up best when he made the following comment, after the war, on the subject of close air support:

There were four groups of Marine fliers who, in the interest of the integration of the services, were attached to the Thirteenth Air Force. During the central and southern Philippines campaign I had personal contact with the 12th, 14th, and 32nd Groups, and that was enough to convince me. These fliers had been trained by the Marine Corps with ground troops for the *specific purpose* of supporting ground troops. Their accomplishments were superb in the Zamboanga and Mindanao campaigns. The Marine liaison officers were always in front lines with the infantry commanders, and they were familiar with the forward positions as was the infantry. By radio they guided in the planes, and often the target of the strike was no more than three hundred yards ahead of the huddled doughboys.

Colonel Clayton C. Jerome commanded these air men, and their accurate bombing and strafing earned them the gratitude and friendship of the 24th, 31st, and 41st

Infantry Divisions. Nothing comforts a soldier, ankle-deep in mud, faced by a roadblock or fortified strongholds, as much as the sight of bombs wreaking havoc on stubborn enemy positions. It puts heart into them.⁶²

The success of Marine aviators in the Philippines was not without sacrifice; 58 officers and 42 men of aviation units committed in the archipelago were killed in action; 46 officers and 81 Marines were wounded; and a total of 22 officers and 28 Marines died in operational aircraft accidents, from disease or accidents, or were missing.⁶³

In the evolution of Marine aviation, the experiences gained by Marine pilots in the Philippines marked an important milestone. Close air support of ground forces became an accepted factor in ground operations. Techniques pioneered in the Philippines would require further refinement as new equipment became available; but Marine aviators had proven once and for all that their concept of close air support was correct and workable.

⁶² Eichelberger and Mackaye, *Jungle Road to Tokyo*, p. 250.

⁶³ Figures furnished by Marine Records Section, HQMC, in a Special Aviation Rpt on 19Nov47, cited in Boggs, *Marines in the Philippines*, App. III, p. 152.

⁶¹ Copies of these letters are contained in *Marine Close Air Support File*.

PART V

Marine Aviation in the Western Pacific

Mounting the Offensive¹

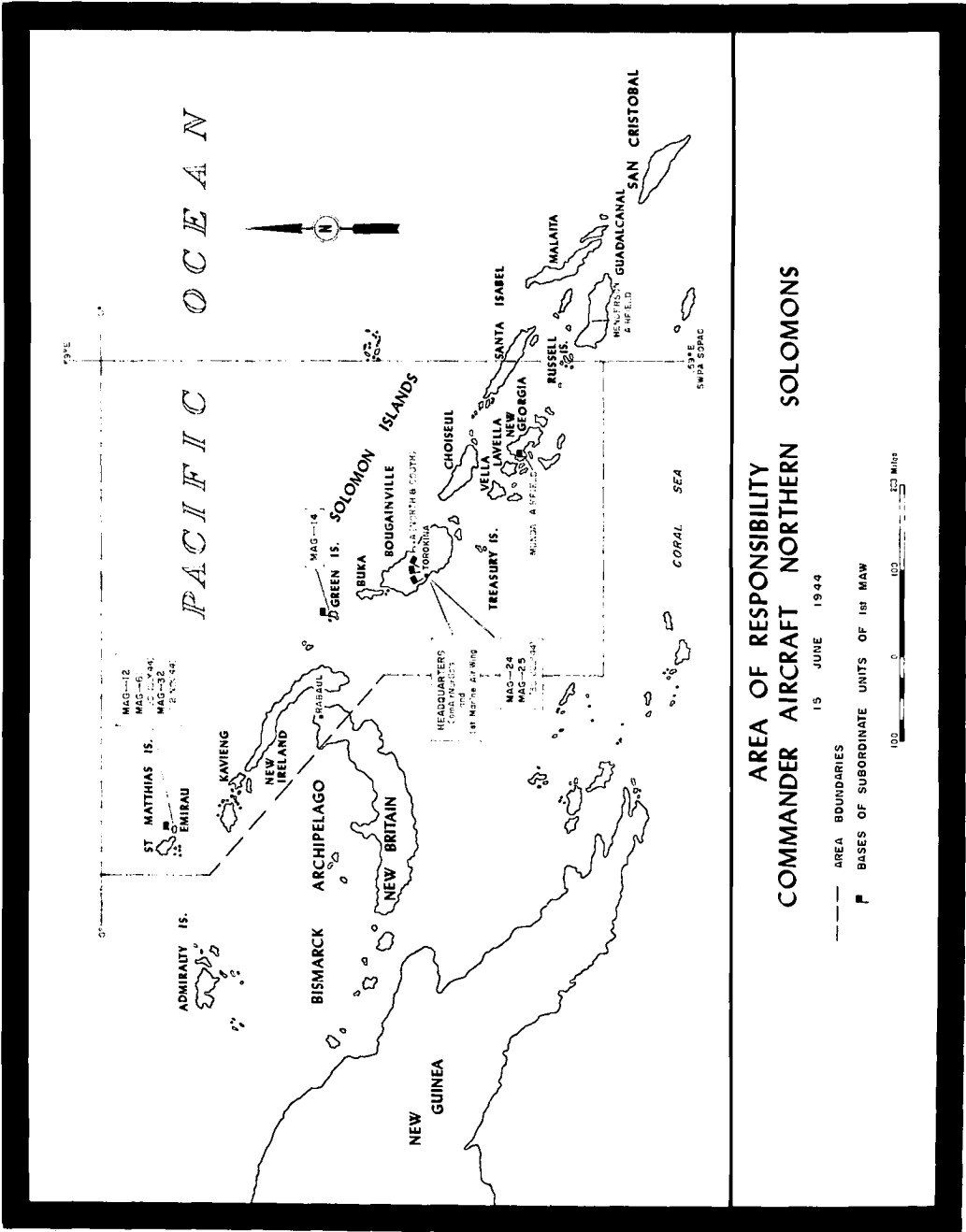
The movement of Marine aviation into the Central Pacific followed the general pattern of operations that earmarked the turning of the tide as the Guadalcanal campaign neared a successful conclusion. In late February 1943, U.S. Army troops, supported by Army Air Forces and Marine squadrons based at Henderson Field, landed

in the Russell Islands. By May, an airstrip had been completed on Banika from which Marine dive bombers, as well as Army and Navy aircraft, stepped up the air war against enemy fields along the chain of islands extending up to Bougainville.

Invasion of the New Georgia Group in the Central Solomons on 30 June by a joint Marine-Army force was supported by squadrons of MAG-21. In addition to providing close air support to the ground troops, it became a prime mission of Marine aviation to reduce Japanese air strength in the Solomons and at the same time neutralize and isolate Japanese strongpoints that had been bypassed in favor of seizing more weakly defended islands farther to the enemy's rear. This strategy was successfully applied to recently established enemy airfields on New Georgia that had been designed to support the five major air bases ringing Rabaul, which were neutralized from the air for more than a year. Similarly, the capture of Vella Lavella Island effectively isolated an enemy garrison of 10,000 on Kolombangara Island 20 miles to the southeast. (See Map 22).

Once the success of such island-hopping tactics had been established, it was a foregone conclusion that they would be applied in the Central Pacific which was the logical next step in the American drive towards the Japanese

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this chapter is derived from: DivAvn, HQMC, Pers and Loc Status Sheets, Mar43-Dec46, hereafter DivAvn, *Status Sheets*, with date; 4th MBDAW WarDs, Dec42-Mar46; MAG-13 WarDs, Jan43-Sep44; MAG-15 WarDs, Jan43-Dec45; MAG-22 WarDs, Apr43-Dec44; MAG-22 Hist, Mar42-Apr47; MAG-31 WarDs, Feb43-Jul46; VMF-111 WarDs, Jun43-Nov45; VMF-113 WarDs, Jan43-Jul45; VMF-151 WarDs, Apr43-May45; VMF-224 WarDs, May42-Jun44; VMSB-231 WarDs, Jun43-Jul45; VMF-241 WarDs, Apr42-Dec44; VMF-241 Hist, Mar-Dec43; VMF-311 WarDs, Sep43-Aug45; VMSB-331 Hist, Feb43-Dec44; VMJ-353 WarDs, Jun43-Jun44; VMF-422 WarDs, Jun43-Dec44; VMF-422 Hist, Jan43-Apr47; VMF(N)-532 Hist, Apr43-May47; Richard W. Johnston, *Follow Me!—The Story of the Second Marine Division in World War II* (New York: Random House, 1948), hereafter, Johnston, *2d MarDiv Hist*; Masatake Okumiya, Jiro Horikoshi, and Martin Caidin, *Zero!* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1956), hereafter, Okumiya, Horikoshi, and Caidin, *Zero!*, quoted with permission; Capt. Carl W. Proehl, *The Fourth Marine Division in World War II* (Washington: Infantry Journal Press, 1946), hereafter Proehl, *The Fourth Marine Division*; DeChant, *Devilbirds*; Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*.



E. L. Wilson

Map 22

home islands. United States strategy for operations in the Central Pacific called for the seizure of the Gilbert Islands, to be used as a stepping-stone towards the Marshall Islands, the Marianas, and in time, the Carolines. The offensive in the Central Pacific was to begin on 20 November 1943 with an attack against the Gilberts. Operations in the Central Pacific were to be conducted under the command of Admiral Chester W. Nimitz. In emphasizing Navy sentiment towards the employment of Marines for assault missions of this type, Admiral Ernest J. King, Commander in Chief of the United States Fleet, expressed his conviction "that they were singularly appropriate for assaults on atolls, where no extended ground operations would follow the landings. In this kind of warfare you either take an island or you do not take it."²

Marine aviators took part in preliminary movements towards the Gilberts as early as 25 August 1943, when the 2d Marine Airdrome Battalion (Reinforced) moved into Nukufetau, a small atoll in the Ellice Islands. With the help of naval construction battalions, Marines constructed a fighter strip in Nukufetau, where VMF-111 landed on 20 October. Following this, the Seabees cut down 50,000 coconut trees to make room for a bomber strip. On 7 November, Navy Bomber Squadron 108 (VB-108) arrived on the strip, followed a week later by VMSB-331. Subsequently, a U.S. Army Air Force B-24 squadron also was based on this field.³

On 31 August, the 16th Naval Construction Battalion, together with a detachment of the 7th Marine Defense Battalion (Reinforced) had gone ashore on Nanomea, the northernmost of the Ellice Islands, situated about 400 miles southeast of Tarawa. A Marine fighter squadron, VMF-441, arrived on the island in late September. After an uneventful stay, the Marine squadron relinquished Nanomea in December to two Army Air Forces heavy bomber squadrons.

In connection with the Gilberts operation, it should be noted that the primary purpose for the expenditure of lives and materiel was not the elimination of Japanese garrisons on Tarawa and other islands in the group, but the further use to which the islands could be put in pursuit of the overall American strategy in the Pacific. To this end, initial possession of the Gilbert Islands, and subsequent seizure of the Marshalls would provide the United States with a base for an attack against the Marianas. In effect, the island groups and atolls in the Central Pacific represented unsinkable aircraft carriers. It was hoped that the airplane—capable of spanning ever-greater distances and of carrying an increasing bomb load—would be the medium that could isolate the enemy on the ground, knock him out of the sky, and when within launching distance of the Japanese homeland, could curtail and in time eliminate his capacity to wage war.

The epic assault by the 2d Marine Division on Tarawa in the Gilberts was

Div, HQMC, dtd 1Sep67, in *Marine Aviation Comment File*, hereafter *Cole ltr*.

² King and Whitehill, *A Naval Record*, p. 481.

³ Col J. Frank Cole ltr to Head HistBr, G-3

destined to write an indelible page in the history of the Marine Corps. Heavy resistance and unusual beach and tidal conditions resulted in 20 percent casualties among the 15,000 Marines in the assault force.⁴ Nevertheless, after three days of ferocious fighting, the 2d Marine Division was in firm control of Betio Island.

Marine aviators were not directly involved in air operations at Tarawa and at Makin Island either prior to or during the amphibious assault. Such aerial support was the task assigned to Army Air Forces pilots and carrier-based Navy aviators. Bombers of the Seventh Air Force, flying from recently occupied Nanomea and from Funafuti in the Ellice Islands, 660 miles east of Tarawa, were charged with denying the enemy the use of his airfields on Tarawa, Makin, Mille, Jaluit, Maloelap, and Nauru. Between 13 and 19 November 1943, they dropped 63.3 tons of bombs on Tarawa, in addition to flying missions against the other islands in the Gilberts and the Marshalls. On 18 November, naval planes dropped more than a hundred tons of bombs on Tarawa; nearly 70 additional tons were dropped on the following day. Altogether, approximately 900 carrier-based naval aircraft supported the operation in the Gilberts. The pilots flew 2,284 sorties in missions designed to neutralize Japanese air bases, provide direct support of ground operations, oppose enemy air efforts, and create diversions on adjacent islands.

Japanese efforts to assist their hard-pressed garrisons in the Gilberts con-

sisted of air and submarine activity. Neither arm proved capable of seriously interfering with the American assault, though on 20 November one Japanese aircraft scored a torpedo hit on the light carrier *Independence*, which had to withdraw for repairs. Four days later, the enemy submarine *I-175* torpedoed and sank the escort carrier *Liscome Bay*, but even this serious loss failed to stem or even delay the tide of events in the Gilberts.

For Marine aviators, hampered by the short range of their aircraft, the Gilberts operation consisted of executing search and patrol missions and generally fulfilling a base defense mission. When, on 23 November, the smoke of battle lifted over newly captured Betio, the time had come to bury the dead, clear up the debris of battle, and take stock of what had been accomplished. Of the valor of the Marines, who had seized the island, little remained to be said; long rows of casualties awaiting burial spoke for themselves. The enemy's fanaticism in holding the atoll to the last also required little comment. In view of the 3,000 tons of naval shells hurled at Betio, an island less than half a square mile in size, and the relative ineffectiveness of this bombardment, Admiral Nimitz expressed the view that "heavier support of this kind is not to be expected in the Central Pacific Campaign, but increased efficiency in that support is to be expected."⁵

Following the Tarawa operation in

⁴ Shaw, Nalty, and Turnbladh, *Central Pacific Drive*, Pt II, pp. 23-114.

⁵ CinCPac forwarding ltr of 15Dec43 on ComCenPacFor rpt dtd 10Dec43, cited in Isely and Crowl, *U. S. Marines and Amphibious War*, p. 230.

late 1943, General Holland Smith recommended that Marine aviators be assigned to escort carriers, where they would play a part in furnishing direct air support in any future amphibious operation involving a Marine division. In the event such an assignment was not feasible, the Navy aviators given this mission would have to receive special indoctrination and training in close support tactics.

At the time, the climate was not yet ripe for the changes recommended, partly because the Navy already had its carriers earmarked for other employment and partly because not all of the Marine officers grappling with this important issue were pushing in unison for the same objective. In this connection, criticism may be directed against those both within the Navy and within the Corps who simply failed to see a need for putting Marine aviation on carriers. In the words of at least one authority on this subject:

High-ranking Marine officers—aviators and non-aviators alike—showed a remarkable lack of foresight in failing to insist that their flyers be put on escort carriers at this time. It is easy to say that "Ernie King would never have stood for it," or "Admiral Whoosis doesn't believe in Marine aviation." But it was the job of the Marine Corps to find the right "persuaders."

The truth is that the top Marine aviators didn't pay enough attention to (1) close support, (2) amphibious landings, (3) a combination of the two. They were too deeply interested in shooting enemy planes out of the wild blue yonder, so they lost sight of their primary mission.⁵

The story of how, following lengthy

negotiations in 1944, Marines finally did get carriers assigned to them, has been well told elsewhere in this series.⁷ In any case, during operations in the Central and Western Pacific in 1944 and early 1945, the absence of such close air support by Marines as had been envisioned was bound to have a profound and long-lasting effect on the role that Marine aviation could be expected to play during this phase of the war. One authoritative account of the campaign summed up the situation in the following words:

The decision, however, prevented Marine pilots from supporting their comrades and army troops ashore in the Marshalls and the Marianas. Marine pilots in the Central Pacific before Tarawa served important defensive missions, but after that battle, since their craft were of short range, they watched the war leave them far behind. Their principal function in that section of the globe was bombing by-passed atolls.⁸

On 26 November, while the last enemy defenders were being hunted down on the northern islands of Tarawa Atoll, a Marine transport plane piloted by Major Edmund L. Zonne, executive officer of VMJ-353, landed on the newly reconditioned Japanese airstrip on Betio. This was the first Marine aircraft to touch down on the freshly captured island. At the same time, naval

⁷ For a detailed account of Marine air on carriers, see Benis M. Frank and Henry I. Shaw, Jr., in *Victory and Occupation—History of U. S. Marine Corps Operations in World War II*, v. V (Washington: HistBr, G-3 Div, HQMC, 1969) pt. III, Chap. 2, section entitled "Marines on Carriers," pp. 410-429, hereafter Frank and Shaw, "Marines on Carriers."

⁸ Isely and Crowl, *U. S. Marines and Amphibious War*, p. 231.

⁵ Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*, p. 235.

construction battalions and Army engineers began work on airfields on Makin and Apamama Islands. Scheduled flights to the latter two islands got under way in mid-December, when both airstrips became the terminals of regular passenger flights.

Christmas Day of 1943 witnessed the forward displacement of the 4th MBDAW, commanded by Brigadier General Lewie G. Merritt, who on 5 October had succeeded General Campbell as wing commander. The forward echelon of the wing moved from Funafuti in the Ellice Islands to Tarawa; a week later, on 2 January 1944, the rear echelon displaced from Tutuila in Samoa to Funafuti. In August 1943, when General Campbell had first brought the wing to Tutuila, he had under his command the forward echelons of VMJ-353 and VMF-224, as well as MAG-13, consisting of Headquarters Squadron 13 and Service Squadron 13, VMF-111, -151, -241, and -441. Five squadrons of Fleet Air Wing 2 were attached to his command for operational control.

Increasing Marine aviation strength in the Central Pacific was reflected in the organization of the 4th MBDAW at the beginning of 1944. General Merritt had under his command MAG-13, headed by Colonel Lawrence Norman; MAG-31, commanded by Colonel Calvin R. Freeman; and units of Fleet Air Wing 2, which was headed by Rear Admiral John Dale Price, with headquarters at Kaneohe, Hawaii. MAG-13, based on Funafuti, consisted of its headquarters and service squadrons and VMSB-151 and -331. In addition to headquarters and service squadrons, MAG-31, based on Wallis Island on the

western fringes of Samoa, was comprised of VMF-111, -224, -311, -422, and -441. Units of Fleet Air Wing 2 in the Samoa-Gilberts-Ellice area consisted of three scouting squadrons, two patrol squadrons, four bombing squadrons, and a photographic squadron.

Marine aviators arriving in the South and Central Pacific often found the accommodations awaiting them little to their liking, as indicated by the history of one bombing squadron, whose author had this pungent comment to make:

Wallis Island in French Samoa is by no stretch of the imagination the Pearl of the Pacific. It has gained the reputation—at least among the personnel of this squadron—as about the best spot on God's earth to keep away from. The health conditions were far from favorable and the quarters were not very satisfactory, being in part tents and in part huts constructed by the natives without floors or similar improvements. The recreational facilities—such as they were—consisted of a movie theater at a distance which invited only the most ambitious, and half a dozen books and a dart game which our predecessors had left behind. There were no electric lights, the water supply lasted for about half an hour a day, and the food was made up almost entirely of C rations. And to top matters off it was either so dusty you couldn't breathe or so muddy you couldn't walk, and always present was the tropical mosquito responsible for giving at least half the complement Dengue fever at one time or another. But despite the personal difficulties that everybody had to contend, our planes were kept in the air and the patrols went out on schedule and an intensive training program was undertaken.^o

After only about three weeks on Wallis Island, the first ground echelon departed on 13 November for Nukufetau

^o VMSB-331 Hist, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

in the Ellice Islands. By 28 November, all of VMSB-331 had settled down on Nukufetau. The island was described as "a coral atoll about the size of a ten cent piece and when the tide was in gave us around 9 cents change. The health conditions were as good as those at Wallis had been bad. There were no mosquitoes and no diseases and the worst we had to contend with were tribes of rats."¹⁰

Two days following its arrival on Nukufetau, VMSB-331, commanded by Major Paul R. Byrum, Jr., dispatched a detachment of six SBDs and maintenance personnel to Tarawa to lend a hand in air patrols and possible air strikes. One such strike materialized on 21 December, when 5 SBDs, together with a dozen Army B-24 bombers and 15 of the new Navy F6F Grumman fighters as escorts, attacked enemy shipping at Jaluit in the Marshalls. In the course of this strike, the squadron claimed credit for sinking a 6,000- or 7,000-ton cargo ship in the Jaluit lagoon. Postwar accounts have made it appear more likely that the enemy ship sunk on this occasion was a 1,912-ton converted water tender already immobilized in a previous raid by naval aircraft from the *Yorktown*. In any case, the men of VMSB-331 considered the sinking of an enemy vessel during their first combat mission a promising omen. This air strike turned out to be the only offensive mission executed by any unit under the 4th MBDAW until March 1944.

The attack inflicted little damage on

the Japanese in the Marshalls. Possibly, the greatest significance can be found in the presence of the F6F Grumman fighters. This new Grumman fighter, otherwise known as "Hellcat," made its debut during the Gilberts Operation. Like the Corsair, the F6F was powered by a Pratt & Whitney 2,000-horsepower air-cooled radial engine. This airplane quickly won the grudging admiration of Japanese aviators, one of whom expressed this opinion of the Hellcats' capabilities:

There is no doubt that the new Hellcat was superior in every respect to the Zero except in the factors of maneuverability and range. It carried heavier armament, could outclimb and outdive the Zero, could fly at higher altitudes, and was well protected with self-sealing fuel tanks and armor plate. Like the Wildcat and Corsair, the new Grumman was armed with six 12.7mm machine guns, but it carried a much greater load of ammunition than the other fighters. Of the many American fighter planes we encountered in the Pacific, the Hellcat was the only aircraft which could acquit itself with distinction in a fighter-vs.-fighter dogfight.¹¹

Following their capture by the Americans, Tarawa, Makin, and Apamama Islands immediately were converted into a springboard for the aerial offensive against the Marshall Islands. By late December, no less than four airfields in the Gilberts had become operational, and B-24s had begun staging missions through Tarawa. As 1943 drew to a close, bombers of TF 57 dropped 550 tons of bombs on the Marshalls and 28 tons on Nauru, an island 525 miles west of the Gilberts. Japanese

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

¹¹ Okumiya, Horikoshi, and Caidin, *Zero!*, p. 222.

antiaircraft fire was frequently intense and hostile fighters also took a toll of American bombers. Enemy land-based aviation in the Marshalls, however, was unable to cope with the development and operation of American bases only 300 miles to the south; during the latter part of December 1943, and throughout January 1944, the Japanese raided the new American bases in the Gilberts on more than 30 occasions. With only one exception, the Japanese air attacks occurred at night. Total damage inflicted at the four airfields consisted of 33 aircraft destroyed, 9 planes damaged, 5 men killed, and a number of men wounded. In early December 1943, the arrival on Tarawa of VMF(N)-532, commanded by Major Everette H. Vaughan, severely hampered the after-dark raids of the enemy air marauders. Major Vaughan's night fighters were the first planes of this type to reach the Central Pacific, though a sister squadron, VMF(N)-531, had already begun to fly night patrols from Banika in the Russell Islands in September 1943.

Throughout January 1944, preparations for the imminent invasion of the Marshall Islands continued at a brisk pace. By the 13th, the 4th Marine Division had arrived in Hawaii en route to the Marshalls from the west coast of the United States. The Marine division, as well as the Army's 7th Infantry Division, departed Hawaii on 22 January en route to Kwajalein. A total of 297 ships, not including fast carrier task groups or submarines, transported about 54,000 troops to their objectives. A force of three cruisers, four destroyers, and two minelayers stood by to neutralize enemy bases at Wotje and

Taroa. Landings were scheduled for 31 January.

As in the case of Tarawa, Marine aviation was not scheduled to play an active part in the amphibious phase of the assault. Once again, the Marine squadrons based in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands were assigned patrol and logistic missions. After the initial objectives in the Marshalls had been seized, Marine air squadrons were to relocate rapidly to them. In line with this forward movement, MAG-13 was to displace to Majuro. The destination of MAG-31 was Roi Island, at the northern tip of Kwajalein Atoll. During the first two weeks of January, VMF-111 under Major J. Frank Cole, VMF-224, commanded by Major Darrell D. Irwin, VMF-441, headed by Major James B. Moore, and VMF-113 under Major Loren D. Everton joined MAG-31, as did VMF(N)-532.¹²

Six planes of the latter squadron, comprising its forward echelon, were the first aircraft to land on the newly activated field at Roi, led by the squadron commander, Major Vaughan. The latter was to comment later:

I was the first American pilot to land on Roi as I led the unit there via Makin Island. The story was carried by United Press and appeared in the San Diego Union saying that I was the first American pilot in the Central Pacific to land an

¹² "After Roi was bombed and supplies and space were limited, the ground echelon of VMF-111 was returned to Makin Island to join the air echelon waiting there. VMF-111 remained on Makin bombing bypassed islands in the Marshalls. A typical day would see planes take off from Makin, bomb Mille, rearm and refuel at Majuro, and strike again on the return to Makin." *Cole ltr.*

aircraft on pre-war-held Japanese territory. I had been instructed to let Colonel Calvin Freeman make the first landing but when I arrived in the vicinity of Roi with my group of aircraft low on fuel, the Colonel was not in the area so, I proceeded to land. (I heard much about it later when he did arrive!)¹³

In order to further strengthen Marine aviation in the Central Pacific, MAG-22, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel James M. Daly, was scheduled to come under General Merritt's 4th MBDW in early February 1944. The air group had been stationed on Midway Island ever since 1 March 1942, and following the epic defense of that island, had led a relatively peaceful and isolated existence there, engaged in routine patrols and occasional search and rescue missions.

Into the period preceding the invasion of the Marshall Islands falls the saga of VMF-422, destined to become the "Lost Squadron." VMF-422, commanded by Major John S. MacLaughlin, Jr., had been part of MAG-22 until 15 December, when it was detached from the air group and flown to Hawaii in transport aircraft. Upon arrival there, the ground echelon was attached to the task force staging for the invasion of the Marshalls. On 17 January 1944, the flight echelon consisting of 27 pilots and 3 enlisted men together with 24 newly issued Corsairs, boarded the escort carrier USS *Kalinin Bay* and departed for the Gilbert Islands on the following day. Once the escort carrier arrived within 50 miles of Tarawa, the

squadron was to launch its aircraft and fly to Hawkins Field on Betio Island for further orders from Admiral Hoover, who had assumed direct operational command of garrison aircraft effective 11 January.

On the morning of 24 January, the aircraft were catapulted as planned practically within sight of Tarawa and shortly thereafter landed on Hawkins Field. The three spare pilots, as well as the three enlisted men who were to service the planes, went ashore by boat. Upon its arrival on Betio, the squadron received orders from Admiral Hoover to proceed to Funafuti, pending further assignment within the scope of Operation FLINTLOCK, the invasion of the Marshalls.

At 0945 on 25 January, 23 of the Corsairs left for Funafuti on a two-leg trip of a 700-mile flight; a stopover was scheduled at Nanomea, the northernmost of the Ellice Islands, about 463 miles south-southeast of Tarawa. One aircraft remained behind at Hawkins Field because of starter trouble. The flight departed Betio Island under good weather conditions without any navigational escort. Major MacLaughlin, the squadron commander, led the fighter formation of three flights. Estimated time of arrival at Nanomea was 1225.

Flying at an altitude of 2,000 feet, the squadron encountered the first of two severe weather fronts only 15 minutes before reaching Nanomea. The front rapidly developed into a violent tropical storm, reaching from sea level to over 13,000 feet. Because the torrential downpour greatly restricted visibility, the squadron commander ordered the planes to descend to a water-level

¹³ Col Everette H. Vaughan ltr to Head, HistBr, G-3 Div, HQMC, dtd 28Sep67, in *Marine Aviation Comment File*.

course and to follow it through the disturbance. When the flight emerged from this front, it discovered that three Corsairs had lost formation and had disappeared from sight. Radio contact was maintained with these pilots, but they had been hopelessly separated from the formation and were on their own. Of the three, Captain John F. Rogers disappeared without a trace. The second, Lieutenant John E. Hansen, was able to get bearings towards Funafuti from one of the other pilots and actually reached his destination. The third, Lieutenant Walter A. Wilson, landed on an island, where natives looked after him until he was taken off by a destroyer, the USS *Hobby*.

The remaining 20 pilots established their position as being over Nui Island, about halfway between Nanomea and Funafuti. At this point, one of the Corsairs piloted by Lieutenant Christian F. Lauesen developed engine trouble and made a water landing. The flight circled over him and observed that he was afloat by means of his "Mae West" life preserver; the pilot's life raft, however, was not to be seen. While the remainder of the pilots continued the flight, one of the group, Lieutenant Robert C. Lehnert, circled the castaway pilot until his own plane ran out of gas and Lehnert was himself forced to bail out. After hitting the water, Lehnert conducted a futile search for Lauesen with whom he intended to share his life raft. Lauesen was never seen again and Lehnert himself remained adrift for two days before he was rescued.

At 1245 Major MacLaughlin informed the remainder of the flight that he had made contact with the Funafuti

beam¹⁴ and that they would proceed there. At this time, the squadron encountered a second squall which, if anything, was worse than the first. As the storm increased in violence, the flight again reported navigational difficulty. Simultaneously, something went haywire with the squadron commander's radio receiver. Failing to contact Major MacLaughlin by radio, Captain Cloyd R. Jeans flew across the squadron commander's bow and attracted his attention. Aware of the malfunctioning of his receiver, Major MacLaughlin turned over command of the flight to Captain Jeans and ordered the latter to lead the flight back to Nui Island. Shortly thereafter, Major MacLaughlin was observed to fly a course tangent to the rest of the flight. He disappeared in the thick overcast and was not sighted again, despite the efforts of his wingmen to keep him in view.

Led by Captain Jeans, the flight made a 45 degree turn off its original heading of 180 degrees and reversed course towards Nui. In an effort to avoid the squall, some of the pilots broke formation and quickly became confused as to their positions. Lieutenant Earl C. Thompson disappeared into the tropical storm and was not seen thereafter. At 1500, Lieutenant Robert P. Moran, one of the 16 remaining participants in the flight informed Captain Jeans that contact with Nanomea had been established. This link lasted for only five

¹⁴ Beam—a directional radio signal transmitted in quadrants from a radio range station audible as a continuous tone or whine as long as an aircraft proceeds directly on the proper course, but audible as dot-dash or dash-dot as it veers to the left or right.

minutes, for Lieutenant Moran's plane ran out of fuel. The pilot parachuted but became entangled in his shroud lines and drowned in the heavy surf off Nui Island.

For the 15 remaining pilots, the confusion was compounded by the fact that the aircraft were not flying at identical speeds. In summing up the disastrous flight, the squadron history was to describe the plight of VMF-422 in this manner:

Some elements of the formation were compelled to fly full throttle to maintain contact with the flight leaders, as the latter maintained normal cruising speed. However, the density and violence of the storm prevented flying a standard formation, resulting in maneuvers at full throttle one instant and retarded throttle the next. Several pilots soon reported being low on fuel. Those who maintained good formation had sufficient gas to have possibly reached Funafuti.¹⁵

At 1530 two of the remaining pilots informed Captain Jeans that they were running short of fuel and had to land. One of them, Lieutenant William A. Aycrigg, set his plane down in the water and was seen to be riding in his life raft. The other pilot ditched seven miles away. At this point, Captain Jeans decided that the remaining aircraft should hit the water together, because it appeared that most of the planes would shortly run out of fuel, though several pilots reported having sufficient gasoline to remain airborne for another hour. The flight then formed a traffic circle and made water landings. Of the two pilots that had run out of fuel at 1530, Lieutenant Aycrigg vanished in the

vastness of the Pacific and was never found. The pilot of the second aircraft, Lieutenant Theodore Thurnau, was rescued by the USS *Welles* on 28 January.

The remainder of the flight landed and, with one exception, each pilot got his life raft and survival equipment out of the plane before it sank. One pilot lost all of his clothing and equipment extricating himself from his plane and had to take refuge on board one of the other rafts. By this time, the other 12 pilots had joined and had started to pool their equipment for equal sharing among the survivors. The rafts were secured together by the cord hand holds but in the extremely heavy seas some of these holds were torn off. Eventually, the rafts had to be held together by hand.

The drifting aviators quickly noticed that their new environment was hardly more secure than the turbulent air had been. In fact, there appeared a new kind of hazard:

A number of sharks were observed, some making passes at the sea anchor or scraping against the boats—which added nothing to the peace of mind of the occupants. Facetious names were given to the most persistent of these animals, one being readily identifiable by a notched dorsal fin. Their persistence in scraping against the boats grew to such an extent that one of them was finally shot, whereupon all dispersed. To the now familiar statement, "There are no atheists in foxholes," may it also be added that there are no atheists in rubber boats! Frequent "prayer meetings" and songfests helped to bolster morale.¹⁶

The odyssey of VMF-422 ended during the afternoon of 27 January, when

¹⁵ VMF-422 Hist, *op. cit.*, Anx B, Flight Echelon, p. 3.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

a search plane sighted the group. The pilot, eager to be of assistance, landed in the heavy sea and damaged his plane while taxiing to pick up the survivors. The rescuer, himself now marooned, radioed for help. About two hours later, the USS *Hobby* arrived and picked up the 12 pilots of VMF-422 as well as the rescue pilot and eight members of his crew. Upon coming on board, the survivors of VMF-422 were pleasantly surprised to find Lieutenant Wilson, one of the first three pilots that had become separated from the squadron during the first squall, waiting for them. The destroyer had picked him up from his island refuge, which "he left rather reluctantly because of his royal treatment by the natives."¹⁷ A thorough search of the area by the USS *Hobby* and other ships failed to yield any sign of Lieutenant Thurnau. The defunct rescue plane was sunk by naval gunfire. All of the rescued pilots were suffering from immersion, sunburn, and general weakness, though only the pilot that had lost his clothing had to be hospitalized.

On 29 January the 14 castaways were placed ashore at Funafuti, where they were met by Lieutenant Hansen. The latter was the only one to have flown his aircraft to Funafuti. Of 23 Corsairs and pilots that had left Tarawa, only one plane had reached its destination. In addition to the loss of 22 aircraft, the episode cost the lives of 6 pilots.

A board of investigation, subsequently convened to probe the disaster, determined that faulty communications and human error were largely responsible

for the mishap.¹⁸ Radio aids data were incomplete in that voice calls for the bases were not listed and range bearings for the Funafuti range were not given. Operations towers on various fields in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands were monitoring a radio frequency different from that used by the squadron. It was further brought out that no one at Hawkins Field had cleared the flight in the first place. Nothing was sent to Nanomea telling of the flight until that base requested information. The final touch of irony was added when it became known that Nanomea had been plotting the planes by radar since 1225 of 25 January at a distance of between 10 and 70 miles. Inasmuch as Nanomea had not been advised of the flight, the control tower personnel assumed that bombers were passing through the area.

In connection with the VMF-422 disaster, it may be of interest that the Japanese suffered an almost identical mishap earlier in the war, with even more serious consequences. After the war, a leading enemy air ace was to make the following comment on flying conditions and long-distance fighter hops:

In the vast reaches of the Pacific the distance between each small outcropping of land can assume terrifying proportions. Without radar, indeed, without even radios in our Zero fighters, we dared not risk the loss of most of our planes. Our experience in such matters had been tragic. Early in 1943, several squadrons of Army fighter planes, manned by pilots

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ "At least two senior officers in the 4th Defense Wing received letters of reprimand because of this disaster." LtGen Louis E. Woods ltr to Head, HistBr, G-3 Div, HQMC, dtd 2Nov67, in *Marine Aviation Comment File*, hereafter *Woods ltr*.

who had absolutely no experience in long-distance flying over the ocean, left Japan for a base to the south. En route, they encountered severe weather conditions, but refused to turn back. Almost every plane disappeared in the endless reaches of the Pacific.¹⁹

Meanwhile, the invasion date for the Marshalls was drawing near. Fast carrier task groups of Task Force 58, commanded by Rear Admiral Marc A. Mitscher, began preinvasion attacks against the Marshalls on 29 January 1944. Launched from 12 carriers, 700 aircraft began to carry out simultaneous attacks against enemy airfields on Roi, Kwajalein, Wotje, and Taroa (also known as Maloelap). (See Map 23). In the words of an official report, "simultaneous attacks by this force were so successful in achieving surprise and destroying their targets that by evening on 29 January there was not an operational Japanese aircraft east of Eniwetok."²⁰

The American landings on 31 January were executed on schedule. Japanese planners had expected an invasion of Jaluit, Mille, or Wotje and had reinforced those garrisons, as well as the one at Maloelap. That the Americans would strike at Kwajalein, in the heart of the Marshalls, came as a complete surprise to the enemy, whose reinforcement of the atolls under attack was not quick enough to stem the tide. Roi-Namur was secured by noon of 2 February. Two days later, all Japanese resistance on Kwajalein Island came to an end. Majuro Atoll fell into American hands without opposition, having been aban-

doned by the Japanese before the invasion force reached the objective.²¹

Elimination of Japanese air power in the Marshalls was of crucial importance for the continuation of the American drive in the Central Pacific. The widely held view that the Japanese had fortified the Marshalls long before the outbreak of World War II proved to be erroneous. The Japanese had built an airstrip on Roi during the 1930s, but had undertaken little else to fortify the Marshalls until 1941. By the end of that year, the enemy had constructed airstrips on Maloelap and Wotje; the latter island also served as a seaplane base. On Mille, the Japanese completed an airstrip towards the end of 1942, but for the remainder of that year, the total number of aircraft stationed on the four atolls did not exceed 65. As the end of 1943 approached and the invasion of the Marshalls became imminent, the Japanese built up their air strength to about 130 aircraft, which Admiral Mitscher's preinvasion bombing and strafing promptly destroyed.

The first Marine aviation personnel to go ashore in the Marshalls were members of the forward echelon of VMSB-231, which reached Majuro on 3 February 1944. The airstrip on the island became operational on 19 February and two days later the flight echelon, led by the squadron commander, Major Elmer G. Glidden, Jr., took off from the escort aircraft carrier *Gambier Bay* and landed on the island. On 26 February, VMSB-

¹⁹ Sakai, Caidin, and Saito, *Samurai!*, pp. 199–200, quoted with permission.

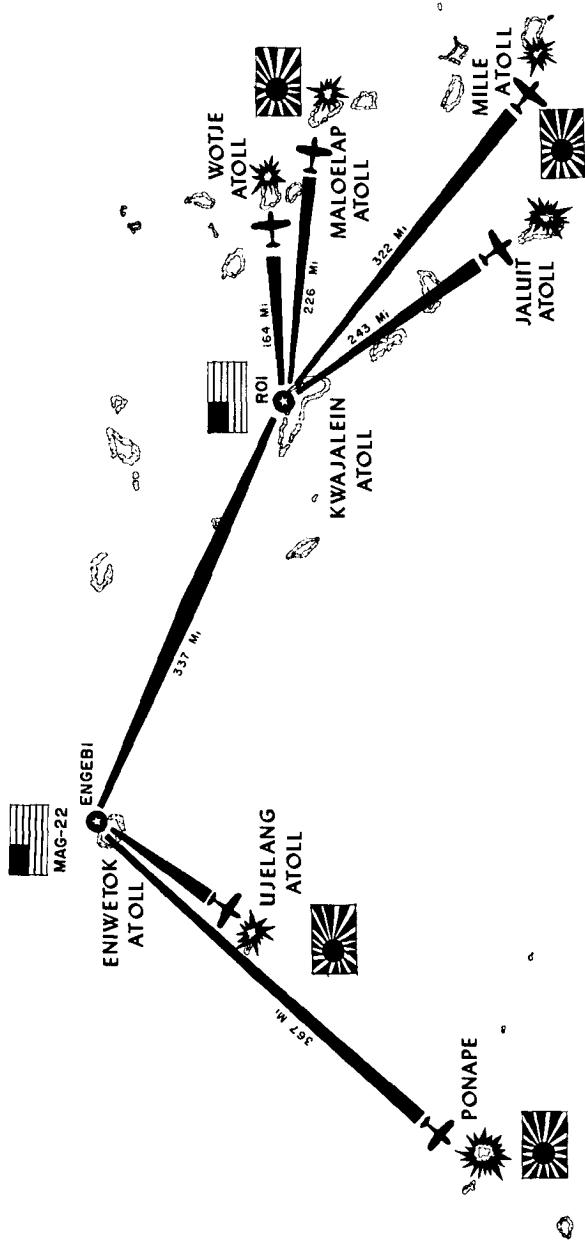
²⁰ USSBS, *Pacific Campaigns*, p. 193.

²¹ For a detailed account of Marine operations in the Marshalls, see Shaw, Nalty, and Turnbladh, *Central Pacific Drive*, Pt 3, v. III, pp. 117–227.

MARSHALL ISLANDS

MAG-22 OPERATIONS

1944



E. L. Wilson

Map 23

331 arrived on Majuro. Both of the MAG-13 squadrons were given the mission of neutralizing the enemy on those Marshall islands that had been bypassed.

On 7 February, Colonel Calvin B. Freeman's MAG-31 moved to Roi right on the heels of the ground action. Only five days had elapsed since the 4th Marine Division had completed the conquest of Roi and Namur Islands and barely 48 hours had gone by since the 7th Infantry Division had eliminated the last enemy resistance on Kwajalein Island, 50 miles to the south. The daring advance into the heart of the Marshalls and Gilberts had brought an area one thousand miles long and including at least seven Japanese strongpoints under the control of the United States. Accruing to the American forces as a result of the Gilbert-Marshalls operations were additional benefits, summed up in an official postwar analysis:

Continuous operation of United States carrier task forces in the area, unchecked by Japanese land-based aircraft, forced the Japanese Fleet to abandon Truk as a major base. Between 3 and 10 February 1944 all units of that fleet except a few cruisers and destroyers of the Area Defense Forces withdrew to Palau and the Empire leaving United States forces in the Central Pacific unopposed except by garrison troops and a decimated Japanese air force.²²

Even though the Japanese no longer considered Truk as a safe anchorage for large segments of the *Combined Fleet*, they nevertheless were determined to hold it to the last. A buildup of enemy strength on Truk began in early 1944 and continued throughout the year. The

Japanese Army sent troops to the island, which soon bristled with pillboxes, minefields, and coast defense and antiaircraft artillery. Navy torpedo boats and rocket launchers supplemented the Japanese defenses on the island. In line with the policy of avoiding, if possible, a direct assault on enemy islands known to be strongly fortified, the JCS decided on 12 March 1944 to bypass and neutralize Truk. Keeping the Japanese on Truk off balance was a job delegated to long-range Army Air Forces and Navy bombers in the Marshall and Admiralty Islands. Cancellation of a direct assault on Truk left Marine aviation without an important part, which, according to initial plans, Marine fighters and dive bombers were to have played in the conquest of the Japanese stronghold. It appeared as if Marine pilots, eager to participate in the advance into the Carolines, would instead be relegated to riding herd on a large number of Japanese marooned on various islands in the Gilberts and Marshalls. This was hardly the type of mission that would appeal to young aviators eager to test their skill in aerial combat with the enemy.

The fledgling Marine fliers should not have been disenchanted with their assignment, for bypassed Japanese had shown themselves to be cunning and dangerous opponents. This fact was brought home to the ground echelon of MAG-31 only five days after its arrival on Roi-Namur. Shortly before 0300 on 12 February, about a dozen enemy bombers, based on Ponape Island in the Carolines, hit Roi in a devastating surprise raid. Immediately preceding the bombing, Japanese scattered large quantities of narrow tinfoil strips in the air,

²² USSBS, *Pacific Campaigns*, p. 194.

which rendered the American radar equipment practically useless. These metallic pieces, known as window or chaff, had first been successfully used by the British Royal Air Force over Germany earlier in the war. The enemy raiders, believed to be seaplanes, came over in four flights of three planes each with about five-minute intervals between flights. The bombs dropped were 500 pounders, antipersonnel bombs, and magnesium incendiaries. One of the first bombs dropped by the enemy scored a direct hit on the biggest bomb dump on the island. In the words of a 4th Marine Division historian, "... a moment later the whole island was an exploding inferno. To elements of the Twentieth Engineers and Seabees, who were still on Roi, the holocaust was more terrible than anything they had gone through in capturing the island."²³

Even more graphic in his description of the resulting inferno was a combat correspondent who commented:

Tracer ammunition lit up the sky as far as we could see and for a full half hour red-hot fragments rained from the sky like so many hail-stones, burning and piercing the flesh when they hit. A jeep exploded in our faces a few yards away. Yet half an hour after the first bomb hit, several hospitals and first aid stations were functioning with all the efficiency of urban medical centers."²⁴

The bombardment from the ammunition dump continued for four hours. When it was all over, nearly half of the air group equipment, which had just been unloaded, lay destroyed about the area. Individual equipment, personal ef-

fects, and the clothing of approximately 1,000 officers and men were also lost. There were casualties as well. Five enlisted personnel of MAG-31 were killed in the course of the attack. Six officers and 67 enlisted men were wounded; they were evacuated to Hawaii, ironically enough on the same ships that had brought them to the Marshalls. An additional 10 officers and 67 enlisted men were wounded, but not seriously enough to require evacuation.²⁵

After 14 February, MAG-31 took positive action to prevent similar attacks. On that date, the air group commander, Colonel Freeman, reached Roi with 10 F4U-1s of VMF-224 and 6 F4U-2s of VMF(N)-532 from Tarawa via a refueling stop at Makin Island. Day and night combat air patrols were instituted at once. Seven additional night fighters of VMF(N)-532 arrived on Roi on 23 February. Two Douglas Skytrain aircraft (R4Ds) brought radar equipment and crews to the island to improve the defense against surprise air attacks.

The drive into the Marshall Islands continued to gain momentum. On 18 February, coinciding with a devastating attack of TF 58 against Truk, two battalions of the 22d Marines seized Engebi Island, in the northern portion of Eniwetok Atoll. On the following day, a combined force of soldiers and Marines went ashore on Eniwetok. Three days later, the 22d Marines seized Parry Island after a stiff fight.

Shortly after the assault troops had landed, Marine aviation personnel came ashore. Among those to land on Eniwetok was the ground echelon of the ill-

²³ Proehl, *The Fourth Marine Division*, p. 34.

²⁴ Marine combat correspondent Bernard Redmond, cited in *Ibid.*

²⁵ MAG-31 WarD, Feb44.

fated VMF-422. Between 17 and 27 January, this echelon had left Hawaii en route to the Marshalls with elements on board the escort carrier *Kalinin Bay*, and the transports *President Monroe*, *Island Mail*, and *Cape Isabel*. On February 6, six days after the invasion of the Marshalls, the ground personnel of VMF-422 on board the *Island Mail* were ordered ashore on Kwajalein. There, they were detailed to stevedore duties; some of the men worked continuously for 48 hours at this task. Others actually participated in the occupation of the island when scattered resistance flared up in some shattered blockhouses and some of the working parties came under small arms fire. Several members of VMF-422, ordered to collect and bury the enemy dead, discovered that not all of those slated for burial had been rendered harmless. Booby traps attached to some of the bodies made the Marines' task not only unenviable and odious, but dangerous as well. In this connection, the official account of the activities briefly states that "officers in charge were quick to recognize dangers to enlisted personnel and the unit was quickly reorganized into small groups with NCO's enforcing rigid discipline."²⁶

The remaining personnel of the fighter squadron's ground echelon on board the *Kalinin Bay*, the *President Monroe*, and the *Cape Isabel* stayed on their ships which were peacefully anchored off Kwajalein Island. On 7 February, this interlude came to an end when the squadron was advised that it would proceed with a new task force in attacking and garrisoning Engebi Island on Eni-

wetok Atoll. Squadron gear was transferred from the *Island Mail* and the *Cape Isabel* in two days. While this work was in progress, Army troops boarded the *President Monroe*, adding greatly to the congestion already prevailing on that ship.

On 18 February, after an uneventful two-day journey, the ground echelon of VMF-422 approached Eniwetok Atoll. The arrival of the convoy at the objective led an observer to note:

Mine sweepers led a mighty column through Deep Passage, assault troops little dreaming that Parry and Japtan Islands, flanking the entrance into the lagoon, would soon be the scene of the most bitter fighting. The *Tennessee* and *Colorado* led the attack columns into the lagoon, proceeding directly to the site of the airfield, Engebi Island, fifteen miles away. The normally khaki colored decks appeared deserted as all hands were ordered below. Troops decorating the rails of transports would be easy prey for hidden Jap marksmen. Despite protestations, officers being in the majority, all recalcitrants were summarily ordered from the weather decks. The importance of guarding against fire from beach positions was forceably demonstrated when a squadron mechanic was seriously wounded by sniper fire as the ship lay at anchor off Engebi Island.²⁷

The preinvasion bombardment of Engebi continued throughout 17 February. Early on the following morning, assault units landed on the island and after a six-hour battle, brought all organized resistance to an end, though enemy pockets of resistance were to remain active for several days. On the evening of 19 February, one month to the day since embarking at Pearl Harbor, the VMF-422 echelon on board the

²⁶ VMF-422 Hist, *op. cit.*, Anx A, Ground Echelon, p. 6.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

President Monroe went ashore. The joy these men felt at having dry land under their feet once again was somewhat diminished as, in the gathering dusk, they bedded down in shell holes and craters on the nearly flat island. Less than a quarter of a mile away, the enemy was still giving battle from remaining pockets of resistance. On several occasions during that long night, small arms fire swept the bivouac of the newly arrived aviation personnel, and a mortar lobbed several rounds into the area.

Throughout the night, the men of VMF-422 on Engebi saw, or at least thought they saw, silhouetted enemy remnants moving from one place of shelter to the next. A squadron security detail fired at fast-appearing and -disappearing shadows without being able to determine who or what was actually transpiring all around them. Some of the doubts as to whether there were still any Japanese around were dispelled on the morning of 20 February, when a Japanese was found occupying a foxhole within the squadron bivouac area. This enemy soldier did not offer any resistance, and after capture, assisted in the apprehension of another 15 troops and laborers.

In the bright light of day, the men of VMF-422 had an opportunity to assess the newly won real estate. The appearance presented by Engebi "on the morning after" made many of them wish that they were back on board ship, as expressed by one of those present:

The unsuspecting initiates were confronted with a disturbing scene as they looked over the newly won island. Enemy dead were grotesquely strewn over the landscape. Duds varying from fourteen inch shells to grenades littered the battle-

ground. All types of enemy ordnance and material, as well as Marine, were scattered over the scarred surface of Engebi. Souvenir seeking was held down to a minimum with repeated warnings of the attendant dangers proving an effective measure. All hands immediately set to work and before the sun reached its high point on the 20th of February, temporary shelters had been erected with many a bomb crater serving as an expedient foxhole.

In the ensuing twelve days, the bivouac area came to be familiarly known as "Jungle Town." It compared favorably with the ramshackle abodes ineptly constructed by wayward citizens in city disposal areas. The procedure included the digging of a three foot deep foxhole, large enough to fence in a necessary cot, and then elaborately camouflaged with Jap corrugated tin. A plentiful supply was on hand. Lightweight Jap lumber, ponchos and remnants of enemy tents were often added to embellish temporary shelters. All these precautions were but slight protection against the hot sun and irritating dust. The well tanned individual fared best as the white skinned Marine suffered from heat blisters which were aggravated by the salt water, the only medium, if temporary, of keeping clean. Guadalcanal veterans readily admitted that this was the roughest going yet.²⁸

In addition to being exposed to the unfavorable climate and poor living conditions on Engebi, enlisted personnel were detailed to working parties, which on occasion manhandled supplies for 36 consecutive hours. Some of the men assigned to such details considered themselves fortunate, for they were on occasion able to obtain a hot meal on board ship, a welcome change from the K rations dispensed ashore. Other work details were engaged in the construction of a squadron living area. There was

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

an ever-present possibility of evening air raids. To at least one observer it appeared that "the likelihood of evening air raids spurred the men on and as the moon became larger on the horizon the tempo increased. Fortunately, no attacks were launched until our unit was squared away in its new area. It was a gesture for which all hands were thankful."²⁹

While the ground echelon of VMF-422 worked to make Engebi habitable, additional Marine aviation units began to arrive on the island. Among the first to reach Engebi was the headquarters of MAG-22 under Colonel Daly, who reached the island on 20 February. The same day witnessed the arrival of AWS-1 (Air Warning Squadron 1), with 9 officers and 218 men. The air warning squadron had moved to Engebi directly from the West Coast. Ten days after setting up its radar equipment on the island, the squadron began to function as a fighter-director unit. On 27 February, VMF-113, coming from Kwajalein, took up station on Engebi. On the same day, eight night fighters of VMF(N)-532 were transferred from Roi to Engebi. Two days later, on the last day of the month, the flight echelon of VMSB-151, commanded by Major Gordon H. Knott, arrived on Engebi following a five-day flight from Wallis Island, roughly 2,000 miles to the southeast. The other half of the squadron remained on Roi Island to fly patrols and cover landings on some of the smaller Marshall islands. That part of the squadron stationed on Engebi was assigned to reef and submarine patrols.

The rapid buildup of Marine air strength on Engebi did not fail to escape enemy attention, and on the night of 8-9 March the Japanese struck. AWS-1 detected the approaching enemy bombers on the radar scope and alerted the night fighter on patrol. A second night fighter was launched, but neither aircraft succeeded in intercepting the enemy. The enemy flight, skillfully using cloud cover and jamming the radar instruments with tin foil, was aided by a stroke of luck, for the first string of bombs, dropped shortly after 0400, rendered the radar equipment inoperative. The VHF equipment, essential for ground-air communication, was destroyed next. As if sensing that they were immune from interception, the Japanese carried out the raid in a leisurely fashion and remained overhead for two hours. During this time, the enemy hit a squadron bomb storage area; the resulting blast was to cause the most damage. Next, a small fuel dump less than 50 yards from the squadron area was hit and burst into flames. The illumination produced by this fire provided the enemy with the light necessary to pinpoint other targets. Antiaircraft fire was meager and ineffectual. As a parting gesture, one of the bombers strafed the north end of the bivouac area.

An assessment of the damage from this air attack showed that, in addition to the bombs detonated and the fuel destroyed, four tents had burned down and many others had been perforated by bomb fragments. For some unaccountable reason, several aircraft parked off the recently completed runway remained undamaged. The raid de-

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

stroyed large supplies of machine gun ammunition and quartermaster items. Casualties to Marine aviation personnel included 3 killed and 21 wounded.³⁰

On 4 March, the 10 fighter and 4 bomber squadrons under the 4th MBDAW began the first of a long series of attacks against Wotje, Maloelap, Mille, and Jaluit Atolls, which were still garrisoned by the Japanese. The enemy, who no longer had any aircraft left, nevertheless, put up a curtain of anti-aircraft fire and scored hits on nearly half of the attacking planes of Majuro-based VMSB-331, the squadron carrying out the first bombing mission. Since most of this surprisingly accurate anti-aircraft fire had come from Jaulit, VMSB-231, on the following day, made the enemy anti-aircraft defenses on that island its special objective.

Continued enemy resistance on the bypassed atolls was particularly surprising in view of the severe pounding inflicted on them over a four-month period by Army, Navy, and Marine aircraft. During the spring and early summer of 1944, the bombing of the four bypassed islands in the Marshalls became a joint enterprise, for in addition to the squadrons of the 4th MBDAW, land-based Navy aircraft and bombers of the Seventh Air Force flew strikes against the islands. Even before Marine aviation became involved in flying missions against Wotje, Maloelap, Mille, and Jaluit, carrier aircraft alone had flown more than 1,650 sorties against the same objectives.

During March 1944, planes from 4th MBDAW squadrons flew a total of 830

sorties against enemy bases in the Marshalls and eastern Carolines. These 830 sorties were flown in 87 missions; during March enemy anti-aircraft fire downed three aircraft. On 18 March, eight Corsairs of VMF-111, based on Makin Island, bombed anti-aircraft gun emplacements on Mille Island. This raid marked the first time that the F4U was used as a fighter-bomber in the Marshalls. Together with an attached Navy F6F squadron, 4th Wing aircraft, including F4Us equipped with improvised bomb racks, dropped 419,000 pounds of bombs on enemy installations. Of this total, 75,000 pounds were 1,000 pound bombs carried by Corsairs. The F4Us carried out 11 bombing raids during March and the results obtained in these raids indicated that the Corsair could be used safely and efficiently as a dive bomber.³¹

All of the strafing and bombing missions flown against the Marshall Islands during March were marked by the complete absence of the enemy in the air. No Japanese fighters were in evidence to intercept air attacks against those bypassed islands. The situation changed temporarily on 26 March, when six Corsairs of VMF-113, led by Major Loren D. Everton, were escorting four B-25s of the Army Air Forces' 48th Bomber Squadron for a strike against Ponape, in the eastern Carolines, 370 miles southwest of Eniwetok. This was the island from which the devastating enemy air attack of 8 March against Engebi had originated. During the later attack, the Marine aviators encountered 12 Zero fighters over Ponape. In the en-

³⁰ 4th MBDAW WarD, Mar44.

³¹ *Ibid.*

suings melee, eight of the enemy fighters were destroyed in the air; three were listed as probably destroyed, and a fighter was destroyed on the ground. None of the Corsairs sustained any damage. This aerial encounter marked the last time for the remainder of 1944 that the enemy dispatched fighters to intercept Marine aviators. For the remainder of 1944, except for occasional night heckling raids, enemy air activity in the Marshalls and Carolines remained completely passive.

Unable to put up any effective resistance in the air against American fighters and bombers, the Japanese decided to strike back against American airfields in the Marshalls during the night of 14 April, possibly for a repeat performance of the damaging raid previously executed against Engebi in March. Once again, Engebi was to be the target of the Japanese attack. As a flight of 12 enemy bombers approached their objective, night fighters of VMF(N)-532 were waiting for them. This is how the squadron history recorded the air action that took place:

During this night operation, Lieutenant Edward A. Sevik was able to reach 20,000 feet in ten minutes. He was vectored on to a bogey, made visual contact, identified the aircraft as enemy, and at fourteen minutes after takeoff, had fired at it and seen it explode. Captain Howard W. Bollman also successfully intercepted and shot down one of the enemy bombers. Lieutenant Joel E. Bonner, Jr. was not so fortunate. Although the bomber he intercepted was probably destroyed it was able to damage Lieutenant Bonner's plane to the extent that it became necessary for him to jump.³²

Lieutenant Bonner was subsequently rescued by the destroyer-escort USS *Steele*. Another night fighter flown by Lieutenant Frank C. Lang completed several interceptions, but all of his targets turned out to be cleverly designed decoys, which the enemy bombers had ejected over the target. Made of tin foil or other thin metallic material, the "Gismos," as they were called by Marine pilots, caused the radar gear on the ground as well as that used in the F4U night fighters, to pick up images.

One night fighter pilot, Lieutenant Donald Spatz, received incorrect directions from a fighter control unit on Eniwetok and instead of heading back to his field, went out to sea and did not return. In addition to the downing of two enemy bombers and the probable destruction of a third, the successful night-fighter operation resulted in all of the enemy bombs being dropped into the water. On this occasion, personnel on Engebi did not suffer any casualties and there was no damage to materiel.

The 4th MBDAW was further augmented when on 1 April, MAG-15, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Ben Z. Redfield, reached Apamama Island, where VMJ-252 and -353 were attached to the air group. This brought the total strength of 4th MBDAW to 4 air groups with 15 flying squadrons and an attached naval squadron. During the month of May, Marine aviators stepped up their attacks against the remaining bases in the Marshall Islands. Once again, Wotje, Mille, Jaluit, and Maloe-lap Atolls were subjected to attack as continuously as weather conditions permitted. In addition to daily dive-bombing and strafing attacks by aircraft of

³² VMF-532 Hist, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

the 4th Air Wing, Jaluit and Wotje Atolls were subjected for one day each to mass attack by the concentrated strength of all available squadrons of the Wing. Army and Navy aviation units carried out additional attacks against these islands. Night harassment of the enemy-held atolls also got under way. The primary purpose of these missions was to keep planes over the target at all hours of the night to drop bombs singly. In this way, the enemy was compelled to remain on the alert and prevented from sleeping.

Use of the F4U-1 fighter as a bomber, begun in March by squadrons of the 4th Wing for the first time in the Central Pacific, increased during May. Results obtained were gratifying; the elimination of a concrete power plant, three reinforced magazines, and a radio station on Wotje Island, and the destruction of a radio station on Aineman Island could be directly attributed to low-level bombing by the F4U. Altogether, during the month of May 1944, General Merritt's wing dropped 949,805 pounds of explosives on enemy positions. The F4Us alone dropped 514,765 pounds of this total and fired approximately 722,000 rounds of .50 caliber ammunition in strafing runs. During the same period, the SBDs dropped a total of 435,040 pounds of bombs on enemy installations.³³

In mid-May Brigadier General Thomas J. Cushman succeeded General Merritt as wing commander. The numbers of missions flown by units of the 4th MBDAW hit a peak in July and August

1944 both in sorties flown and in the tonnage of bombs dropped. By July all Marine squadrons using Corsairs were equipped with the necessary bomb racks and were taking part in dive-bombing and low level bombing attacks. Total tonnage of bombs dropped during the month by 4th MBDAW aircraft amounted to more than 700 tons. The F4Us dropped over 300 tons of this total and fired approximately 448,250 rounds of .50 caliber ammunition in strafing attacks; SBDs dropped a total of nearly 400 tons.³⁴ In August 1944, the bombing reached a peak of 1,200 tons of explosives dropped on the bypassed atolls in the Marshalls; of the total, 650 tons were released by F4Us and 546 tons by SBDs.³⁵

In September the neutralization missions against the remaining enemy-held islands in the Marshalls continued but on a reduced scale. In accordance with an order from the Commander of Shore-Based Aircraft, Forward Area, Major General Willis H. Hale, USA, who in turn was subordinate to the Commander, Forward Area, Central Pacific, Vice Admiral Hoover, the number of squadrons sent on strikes was limited to four per day. As a result of this ceiling on the number of squadrons that could be employed each day and numerous cancellations of strikes due to inclement weather, the total number of sorties flown during the month dropped to about 61 percent of the August total. Tonnage of bombs dropped similarly decreased by about 38 percent.

Compared to what it might have cost

³³ 4th MBDAW WarD, May44.

³⁴ 4th MBDAW WarD, Jul44.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, Aug44.

in human lives had a direct attack been launched to seize the bypassed islands, the cost in pilots and planes expended in keeping these islands neutralized to the end of the war was relatively small. Between the beginning of the employment of Marine aviation against the Marshalls and the end of 1944, the squadrons of the 4th MBDAW lost 29 pilots, 2 gunners, and 57 aircraft due to enemy action. As the summer of 1944 turned into autumn, the observation, harassment, and neutralization of the bypassed islands were extended beyond the Marshalls to Kusaie, Ocean, Nauru, and Wake Island.

As far as much-bombed Wotje, Maolaelap, Mille, and Jaluit in the Marshalls were concerned, visual observation and official photographs indicated that the garrison forces there were capable of repairing the airfields. This capability might enable the enemy to fly in aircraft for supply, evacuation, and reconnaissance. Even though such a possibility was remote, it nevertheless could not be overlooked. At the same time, Marine aviators had to be on a continuous lookout for enemy submarines, which might attempt to supply or evacuate the bypassed bases.

To the north, Wake remained a threat. Even though no shipping or land plane activity had been noted there for some time, reconnaissance had revealed the use of seaplanes, probably for supply or evacuation. The possibility that the Japanese might use Wake Island as a base from which to stage an attack against American bases in the Marshalls could not be excluded. Ponape and Nauru, while largely neutralized, also remained potential threats, espe-

cially as staging points for reconnaissance aircraft.

For many of the Marine aviators, the daily bomb runs over the bypassed enemy garrisons gradually became a monotonous undertaking. On the other hand, the effectiveness of the air strikes in keeping the enemy neutralized in this area was also obvious. A report by the 4th MBDAW stated:

The constant hammering is obviously wearing the Japanese down, for their anti-aircraft fire is steadily getting lighter. There has been no fire from heavy guns for some time, so these obviously have been destroyed. The Japanese now defend themselves with 20, 40 millimeter, and .50 caliber fire. Just what the conditions are on the Japanese Islands, where probably no supplies from home are obtained, is not known for certain; but there can be no doubt that supplies are running low, and the time will come when they will be left without ammunition, weapons, and the necessities of life.

All this, however, isn't a harmless game. The besieged Jap garrisons still have their light anti-aircraft weapons and sufficient ammunition left to make it hot for the Marine birdmen each time they come. Indeed, the Japanese have been getting so much practice in anti-aircraft fire that the Japs remaining in the Marshalls and Gilberts are probably the most proficient anti-aircraft gunners in the world today. Many of the Marines' planes have been shot down, and many pilots have been killed. Again and again planes have returned to their bases after being struck, and the pattern of Japanese bullet holes has been in the dead center of the airplane. Such remarkable hits have been made so many times that it is obviously not a matter of luck.³⁰

³⁰ Capt C. C. Beach memo to LtCol Brayton, 4th MAW, dtd 2Jan45, Encl to 4th MAW WarD, Nov44.

Aside from providing the Japanese anti-aircraft crews with gunnery practice, Marine aviators relieved some of the monotony of their missions by trying out new methods of attack, experimenting with new types of bombs, and by improvising new uses for their aircraft. On 22 April 1944, Major Everton, commanding VMF-113, led three F4Us in a long distance flight to cover landing operations on Ujelang Atoll. Nine hours and 40 minutes after takeoff, the Corsairs returned to their home base. Another long-distance bomber mission flown in October was to set a new record for the fighter-bombers of the 4th MBDAW. For the record, this occasion was noted in the following words:

A notable event of the month was the bombing of Ponape Island on the 5th by Corsair fighter-bombers of the Fourth Marine Base Defense Aircraft Wing—an attack which set a new distance record for Pacific fighter-bomber operations. When this strike was made and the planes completed the long over-water round trip of 750 miles without loss or damage of any kind or injuries to personnel, the event was heralded as the longest fighter-bomber mission ever carried out by such planes with normal bomb loads. By the end of the month such attacks had become routine.³⁷

Another important event during the month of October was the first employment of napalm by aviators of the 4th MBDAW; it was used on the 28th in an attack against Emidj Island in Jaluit Atoll. This was the first of a series of attacks to determine the effectiveness of napalm against enemy installations in the bypassed Marshall Islands. The

first raid, carried out by 17 Corsairs of VMF-224 and 21 Corsairs of VMF-441, was considered promising; jettisonable gas tanks loaded with napalm, dropped on enemy automatic weapons positions, found their mark; as the raiders departed from the area, four large fires, started by the napalm bombs, were still burning brightly.

Before the year 1944 came to an end, several changes in personnel took place within the headquarters of the 4th MBDAW. General Cushman, who on 15 May 1944 had relieved General Merritt as Commanding General, 4th MBDAW, was succeeded on 20 August by Major General Louis E. Woods. Shortly before the end of 1944, there had also been a change in the designation of the air wing, long overdue in the opinion of many Marine aviators. In keeping with the more offensive mission of the air wing during the latter part of 1944, the 4th MBDAW on 10 November 1944 was redesignated as the 4th Marine Aircraft Wing.

The neutralization of the bypassed Marshalls continued for the remainder of 1944. Momentous events had taken place elsewhere in the Central Pacific, where the Marianas and some of the islands in the Palaus had been seized. In early 1945, the invasion of Iwo Jima was imminent. In the southwestern Pacific, the campaign in the Philippines was well underway. On land, on sea, and in the air, the Japanese had sustained major reverses. The general course of the war affected the operations of the 4th Marine Aircraft Wing. Effective 23 January 1945, bombing attacks against the enemy-held islands in the Marshalls and adjacent areas

³⁷ 4th MBDAW WarD, Oct44.

were virtually terminated by a change of policy ordered by the Commander in Chief, Pacific Ocean Areas. Pursuant to this order, such attacks were no longer to be made except where expected results would justify the expenditure of personnel, fuel, and explosives.

Beyond any doubt, this order was issued in the knowledge that by the beginning of 1945, the isolated enemy bases, which had been under almost constant attack since the invasion of the area by American forces a year ago, had been battered into virtual impotence. Most of the enemy installations had been knocked out by air power alone. Fixed anti-aircraft positions for the most part had been destroyed, and shore defense positions blasted to rubble. Bivouac areas had been gutted and the hapless surviving Japanese were virtually forced underground.

Following the implementation of the new policy, Marine aviators were able to devote considerable attention to the destruction of enemy submarines, which became active in the vicinity of the Marshalls during the first week of February, when six verified enemy submarine sightings were made. Countermeasures promptly instituted by air and naval units presumably prevented the enemy from attacking any of the numerous convoys that were passing through the area at the time. Four of the submarines were declared sunk, though ultimately the Marine aviators failed to receive credit for these sinkings. Nor was Marine aviation employed solely against enemy submarines during the turn of the year, for Marine aviators continued their attacks against enemy shipping in the bypassed atolls. In February 1945,

23 small boats were destroyed by Marine aircraft; the following month, search planes attacked and sank 17 small boats of various categories, damaged three more, and attacked six with unobserved results.

The month of February also saw the inauguration of a new phase of warfare in the Marshalls—a war of psychology, an experimental but well-organized campaign in which exhortations to give up and showers of propaganda leaflets replaced the bombs that had reduced the bypassed Japanese bases to a shambles. This campaign was directed initially against the remaining enemy forces on Wotje Atoll. In a novel series of flights, a psychological warfare plane cruised over the islands of this atoll, broadcasting music, news, and messages to the Japanese holdouts. After every flight of this aircraft, planes of VMF-155, commanded by Major John E. Reynolds and subsequently Major Wayne M. Cargill, dropped propaganda leaflets by the thousands. Initial results of the propaganda campaign were meager, though the leaflets may have served to undermine flagging enemy morale.

On 27 February, a transport plane carrying its crew and a number of passengers, including Lieutenant General Millard H. Harmon, Commander, Strategic Air Forces, Central Pacific Area, was lost en route from Kwajalein to Oahu, Hawaii. The disappearance of this plane, for which no explanation was ever found, set in motion an air and sea rescue effort in which all available aircraft participated around the clock. The extended search failed to turn up any wreckage of the plane.

During the month of March, Marine

aviators based in the Marshalls devoted increased attention to interdiction of inter-island traffic between the bypassed islands. To this end, search and patrol craft blasted all forms of surface craft encountered, attacking a total of 39 boats of various categories ranging from small skiffs and rowboats to sizeable power launches. Of this number, 22 were destroyed, 13 were damaged, and 4 were attacked with unobserved results. At the time, American commanders in the Marshalls could only estimate the results of the prolonged isolation on the Japanese marooned on the bypassed islands, though the toll taken by disease and starvation was estimated to be high. That death and hunger were stalking these islands is shown in the diary of a Korean, who was a member of the Japanese force garrisoning Aur Atoll. The diary shows the progressive reduction in strength from 367 men on 1 January to 308 by the end of the month; nearly all of them died of malnutrition. Representative of the diet to which the Japanese were reduced by this time are the following entries:

18 January—

Breakfast: Rice and bush leaves.
 Dinner: Rice and bush leaves, and canned fish.
 Supper: Fried rice, canned fish and salt.
 Every two men must catch a rat for food.
 This kind of food is not good for our health.
 Another new kind of food is added to our diet: earthworm. We began eating earthworm in supper last night.

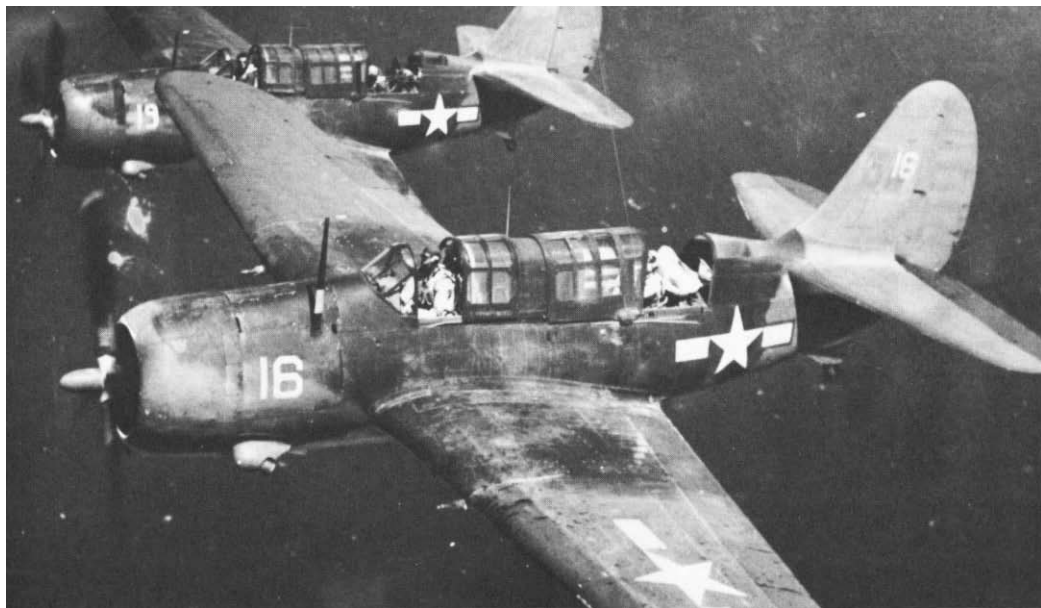
19 January—

Breakfast: Rice and bush leaves.
 Dinner: Too bad, nothing to eat.
 Supper: Rice, salt, and rats.³⁸

March of 1945 saw the first concrete evidence of a deterioration of morale on the part of enemy holdout garrisons in the Marshalls. On 24 March, several Japanese on Wotje Atoll surrendered after verbal exhortations from a plane manned by psychological warfare personnel. The Japanese on Wotje were clearly undernourished and otherwise in poor physical shape. Four days later, 5 Koreans, 1 Japanese, and 2 natives from Mille Atoll surrendered to the crew of LCI-392 after persuasion over a megaphone. Upon interrogation, these gaunt, emaciated, and almost dazed men asserted that hunger was the factor which had led them to turn themselves in. Even the enemy personnel appeared happy to have been taken prisoner.

The month of April saw the use of rockets by 12 Helldivers (Curtiss SB2C scout-bombers) of VMSB-331 against Wotje Island. Of 89 rockets fired against two enemy gun positions, 67 landed in the target area and scored six possible direct hits. Seven rockets failed to function properly and had to be brought back to base. On the 27th, a significant development occurred when three Japanese chief petty officers were taken into custody on Mille Atoll. Following their capture, the prisoners contended that many others would have capitulated if high seas had not prevented them from doing so. As in the

³⁸ Anx D to CTG 96.1 Shore Based Air Force WarD for period 1-30Apr45, 4th MAW WarD, Apr45.



MARINE DIVE BOMBERS *based in the Marshalls en route to target in the bypassed islands. (USMC 118399)*



U.S. PERSONNEL *tour Mille Island after 18 months of continuous bombing by 4th Marine Aircraft Wing. (USMC 134062)*

preceding month, Marine aviators devoted particular attention to interdicting enemy inter-island food supply traffic. Nineteen small craft of various categories ranging from 10-foot rowboats to 30-by-50 foot barges were hunted and strafed. Four of these craft were sunk or completely demolished, 3 were left inoperable, and 12 were damaged in varying degrees.

From the spring of 1945 to the end of the war in the Pacific Theater, the Japanese hold on the islands they still occupied in the Marshalls grew progressively weaker. On 6 May, the destroyer-escort USS *Wintle*, a minesweeper, and YMS-354, infantry landing craft LCIs -392, -394, -479, -491, and -484 together with appropriate air cover evacuated 494 natives from Jaluit Atoll. The Japanese attempted to prevent the evacuation, but were unable to do so. In the course of the operation, the enemy killed a Navy lieutenant, inflicted a bad arm wound on a native scout, and sprayed one of the landing craft with .50 caliber bullets, injuring an enlisted man. On the following day, an additional 84 natives were evacuated from the atoll.

On 11 May 1945, Brigadier General Lawson H. M. Sanderson succeeded General Woods in command of the 4th Aircraft Wing. During the summer of 1945, the neutralization of the bypassed Marshall islands entered a new phase when, in response to the combined strike and psychological warfare campaign, 42 Japanese and Koreans surrendered. On 2 July, search planes located a Japanese hospital ship, the *Takasago Maru*, on an eastward course

and tracked it. At the same time, the destroyer *Murray* departed from Eniwetok with two Japanese language interpreters to investigate the ship. On the following day, the *Murray* stopped the enemy vessel, which was bound for Wake Island to evacuate sick personnel. After boarding the ship, the Americans conducted a search which failed to uncover any violations of international law; as a result, the enemy ship was permitted to proceed to Wake Island. On 5 July, when the hospital ship was on its return voyage, a renewed search indicated that the vessel had picked up 974 patients at Wake, nearly all suffering from serious malnutrition. Medical personnel on board the *Murray* estimated that 15 percent of the Japanese would not survive the return trip to Japan.³⁹ The ship was permitted to proceed on its voyage by order of Admiral Nimitz over Admiral Halsey's objections.

In his memoirs, Admiral Halsey made this comment on the incident:

That made me mad. Although Japan had never signed the Geneva Convention, she professed to observe it; yet I had suspected throughout the war that she was using her hospital ships for unauthorized purposes. This was an instance. Battle casualties are legitimate evacuees; malnutrition cases are not. For three years we had been blockading the bypassed Jap islands in an attempt to force their surrender. The starving men on the *Takasago Maru* had constituted a large part of the Wake garrison; their evacuation meant that Wake's scanty provisions would last that much longer. I sent a destroyer to intercept the ship and escort

³⁹ 4th MAW WarD, Jul45.

her to Saipan, and I intended recommending either that all but her battle casualties be returned to Wake, or that an equal number of Japs be sent there from our Saipan prison camps as replacements. CINCPAC directed me to let her proceed, and I had to comply.⁴⁰

When, on 15 August, Japan accepted the Allied demand for an unconditional surrender, CinCPOA issued an order calling for the cessation of all offensive

operations against the Japanese except for the continuance of searches and patrols. On 22 August, the Japanese commander of Mille Atoll surrendered his forces unconditionally. The remaining Japanese strongholds in the Marshalls capitulated following the signing of the formal surrender documents in Tokyo Bay on 2 September.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Bryan and Halsey, *Admiral Halsey's Story*, p. 258.

⁴¹ For information concerning Marine surrender and occupation duties in the Pacific islands following the war, see Frank and Shaw, *Victory and Occupation*, pp. 449-463.